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HER
HUSBAND'S FRIEND



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HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND.

BY ALBERT ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

"THOU SHALT NOT," "IN STELLA'S SHADOW,"
"SPEAKING OF ELLEN," "WHY I'M SINGLE,"
"HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER," ETC.

"No man ever arranged a difficulty between husband and wife without being himself a sufferer. You cannot unite these millstones, but if you could, you would be ground to pieces between them."—Page 182.



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TO MY READERS.

A few months ago, while enjoying the bathing at Boulogne-sur-Mer, I picked up, quite by accident, a copy of a London newspaper, containing an account of the seizure of certain novels of mine, in the city of New York, on the ground that they were of an improper character. Three days later I was on my way to America, prepared to defend my property and my reputation. When I arrived, I found that a tribunal had already passed upon the question, and that the judgment was in my favor.

No one can doubt that an occurrence of this kind—no matter what its outcome—is very annoying. I have my own idea of what constitutes literary propriety, and I have made pronounced departures from the methods of most of the present school of fiction writers. In doing this I have achieved a success which naturally attracts attention and arouses envy. Incidentally I have made some money, for which I am not at all sorry. But I would no more write what I considered an improper book, than I would break into a bank or forge a check.

While saying this, I may as well admit frankly that I have not pretended to write for small children. To place the standard of novels at the gauge of a school-girl's intellect would be an outrage on the intelligent mature reader. There are subjects worth discussing which the infant mind cannot comprehend. All I claim is that I have never failed to point out the true path; and that, if I have erred at all, it has been in treating my "sinners" too severely.

The story before you is that of a woman and man who passed through sore temptation and emerged triumphant. Surely nothing could be pure if this is not. And yet I have felt as if a censor stood at my elbow and looked over my shoulder as I wrote, ready to cavil at a word, an expression, or a phrase. If there were any recognized authority which could license me to produce a book, as the Lord Chamberlain of England does a play, I would write as I choose and submit to his mutilations. But no one knows from what source lightning may strike the American novel. There are societies, known and unknown, which may take a fancy to "suppress" it. I do not seek for that kind of advertising and I have written accordingly.

"Her Husband's Friend" is not what I would like it to be, but I hope it may prove welcome to that army of readers who have in less than two years purchased three hundred and fifty thousand of my novels. For what is lacking in realism do not blame me, but lay it to those who would make one law for the American author and another for the translator of foreign works.

ALBERT ROSS.

Address:

No. 119 W. 23d Street,
New York City.

HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND.

CHAPTER I

IN THE PLACE DE L' ETOILE.

One beautiful afternoon in the month of June, in the year 1870, two American gentlemen rode slowly up the Avenue des Champs Elysées, in the city of Paris. They had traversed the Place de la Concorde, with its obelisk, its fountains, and its memories of a great past ; and, after creeping at that snail's pace which is the delight of the Parisian cocher along the magnificent way, they paused at the Arch of Triumph, which stands, the wonder of nations, in the Place de l' Etoile. Paris, always lovely from April to October, is at its best in June, and this particular afternoon was as nearly perfect as one could desire.

The gentlemen were both young, if being on the sunny side of thirty entitles a man to that distinction. Each was, in fact, nine-and-twenty years of age, and they had known each other ever since their boyhood days, when they attended the same school in one of the American cities. Though the

most attached of friends, they were little alike, either in their views of life, their habits of thought, or their manner of address.

Harold Mordaunt was the name of the gayer of the pair, a bright, sunny-faced fellow, with a good color, a pair of blue eyes, and an athletic build. He seemed to infuse his own spirits into everything, and entertained his companion with a constant fire of running small-talk in reference to the sights of their drive. Edmund Darrell, the other, was of slenderer mould, with more of the aspect of the student in his make-up, and it would not have taken a very close observer to have detected in his appearance on this June morning a constraint that seemed almost unnatural.

As soon as the carriage in which the friends rode paused before the Arch of Triumph, Mordaunt burst into enthusiastic eulogies of it, both as a work of art and for the genius which it is meant to commemorate. To all of the fulsome praises which he lavished, his companion returned, however, only monosyllabic replies. For a time Mordaunt was too much taken up with the fervor of his own utterances to note his friend's unresponsive mood, but at length it dawned upon him that his interest in the monument was not being wholly shared, and he paused in the midst of an unusually glowing period to ascertain the reason.

"It occurs to me, my dear Edmund," he said with a smile, "that you are not paying as strict attention to my oratory as a good voyager should give to his guide. Are you fully cognizant of the fact that you are standing before the grandest triumphal arch that the world now possesses, if not, as I believe the grandest it ever has owned? Do you

know that this spot on which you are, with its twelve great avenues radiating from this Star, is the centre of all that is beautiful in France and the envy of every other capital in Christendom?"

The other gentleman acknowledged the question by a slight bow, but gave no indication of being particularly impressed by the points enumerated.

"You must not forget, Harry," he replied, pleasantly, "that this is not the first time I have seen this arch. I rode past here on Sunday on my way to the Bois."

"I am quite sure, for all that," responded his friend, "that this does not explain your coolness. People usually find the monument growing upon them with each visit. I know it has been so with me, the same as it was with the Church of St. Peter, at Rome. If I were to come here every day for a year, I think it would impress me more and more to the end. You have seen it twice, forsooth, and your interest in it is exhausted! You have not a word to say in its praise. There is no rapt astonishment in your gaze, no lighting up of your countenance in the presence of the architecturally perfect work."

Edmund Darrell grew slightly uneasy at the knowledge that he was being forced to make an answer he did not relish.

"I will take no issue with you," he said, "on its architectural beauties, but—"

"Oh, confound it! don't bring your Communistic-Anarchistic notions into such a discussion as this!" cried Harry Mordaunt, with an expression of the greatest aversion. "Try to understand what this arch truly represents. It commemorates the victories of the greatest soldier who ever walked the

earth. A nation does well to remember its noblest sons, and France has done no wiser thing than to rear this arch to Napoleon, and to build that regal house for his ashes whose dome you can see over there at the Invalides."

The cab-driver, happy in knowing that he was to be paid by the hour, sat on his box, blinking in the sun and wondering what the two Anglaises were talking about so earnestly.

Darrell gave a slight gesture of impatience.

"You know very well, Harry, that I consider that sort of thing stuff and nonsense," said he. "Bonaparte was simply and solely an ambitious soldier of fortune, who coldly sacrificed a million mistaken followers to gain for himself an empire the greatest in the world, and perished miserably in a prison, as he deserved. All talk about his grandeur is lost on me. As for this monument, if one could consider it solely by itself, it is indeed a thing of beauty. If I were able to forget what it *means*, I might become as enthusiastic as you are. But when I look at it with the light of history in my eyes I can see only the glorification of an unprincipled Corsican butcher. Let us drive on. The memories that this arch calls up will be likely to put me in an ill-temper, and the sooner we get away from it the better."

Harry Mordaunt met these rather waspish expressions with a musical laugh, and, bidding the coachman continue the drive into the Bois, he entered the carriage with his friend. As they passed down the Avenue de la Grande Armée, he resumed the conversation at the point where it had been left off.

"Edmund Darrell, descendant as you are of a long line of French rulers, if not of princes, through your ancestors, the DeCourceys, I am surprised at you.

It is a wonder of wonders that time has made such a raving king-hater out of the happy-go-lucky chap I used to know at school. When you first began to talk like this to me, I thought it merely a new phase of the old humor I remembered so well ; but you have kept it up till I actually am compelled to believe you really mean it ! I should think such fellows as you would keep away from a place like Paris. If you had your way it would be a nice city to live in, wouldn't it ? Not a fountain, not a monument, not a flower-bed—nothing but one dreary dead-level of Equality !”

As Darrell turned toward his companion his dark eyes kindled.

“How inexcusably you misunderstand us, Harry ! Not a monument ! If I governed France—or rather if I were the representative of the People, who ought to and will yet govern her—I would place a monument in that very Place de l' Etoile, greater and grander than that sign of the shambles that now degrades it. Instead of bearing titles that tell only of blood and rapine, it should be covered with the names of the men of all countries who have achieved true glory in the arts and sciences. It should symbolize the grandeur of peace and prosperity, rather than the brutal murder of brethren at the whim of a despot. I would tear down that Corsican's image, and in its place present the likenesses of Shakespeare and Homer, of Dante and Petrarch. The new arch should teach the children to reverence the name of Morse, who invented the telegraph, of Gutenberg, who introduced in Europe the first movable types, of Hoe, who perfected the printing press, of Howe, who revolutionized the art of sewing. It should tell to the world to whom we owe the theory

of vaccination, which has prevented the periodical depopulation of countries ; the anæsthetics that lull to sleep the senses formerly racked with excruciating pain during surgical operations. Think of the glories that a *genuine* Arch of Triumph might bear, and then compare them to this pitiable tale of the most disgraceful page of history in so-called civilized times !"

"Most of the men you speak of have also their monuments," interposed Mordaunt.

"Yes," assented Darrell, quickly. "I wish they could be ranged in a row by the side of that one yonder, so that you could mark the contrast. It would take the stone in all of them put together, to reach half way to the top of this tribute to one man, and the generation that is growing up judges their relative importance by just such visible signs as these. Everywhere is the lesson taught that no one is so deserving of adulation as the successful soldier. Go to London and see which is the tallest monument. Nelson's ! Which is second to it ? Wellington's ! Here it is Bonaparte's. Follow the sun around the earth and see if it is not the same, except where some hereditary king has given the preference to himself or one of his worthless ancestors."

"And you and your Communists will never change it, either," remarked Mordaunt, cynically. "Ah, my dear boy, how silly it is of you to take all the wrongs of mankind on those not too broad shoulders of yours, and set about the herculean task of trying to right such a tangled mess as this world presents ! Here we are in the city of Paris—the loveliest spot that the feet of civilized man is permitted to tread. The sky above our heads is blue ; the air we breathe is salubrious. Thanks to one of those despots you

hate so much, we can drive along a hundred broad avenues or through a score of boulevards, well shaded, well paved, well lit at night—equipped, in short, with everything necessary to our peace and comfort. With his beautiful empress Napoleon rests in his palace at the Tuilleries, enjoying the legitimate results of his daring and successful attempt to recoup his uncle's throne from the Orleans princes, who, like their cousins, the Bourbons, had outlived their usefulness. I know what you are going to say—that he took the throne, not from other crowned heads, but from the people, at the time of the *coup d'etat*. I will admit that there was a little irregularity in the proceeding, but, as principalities go, eighteen years or so gives a very good title. He is at any rate in the saddle, and if you were to try to dispossess him you would not find it an easy thing. Now what has he done to deserve his place? In imitation of the Roman emperor, he found Paris of brick, and he will leave it to his son of stone; he found it full of ramshackle lanes, and he has made it a city of superb distances. He has proved his capacity to govern these Frenchmen much better than they could govern themselves. And if you will pardon me for the suggestion, speaking to you as to a stranger in these parts, it would seem much more becoming in you to thankfully enjoy the treat he has spread out than to growl at everything you see, like a caged mastiff."

Darrell smiled for the first time.

"I never supposed I was deserving of such a comparison as that," he said. "But, seriously, Harry, how could any reform be brought about if all were to follow the rule you lay down? How could Greece or Switzerland have escaped the foreign yoke, how

could the American colonies have become a nation, except by first expressing in vigorous language the wrongs under which they suffered? It was only after the people had been aroused by those who could not be kept silent, that they put their enemies to flight."

Mordaunt opened his blue eyes in mock astonishment.

"Then you believe in war, after all!" he cried. "You do think it proper to shed your brother's blood, occasionally!"

"Without doubt," was the immediate rejoinder, "when freedom is the issue. If that arch we have just left had been reared to a Washington, a Kosciusko or a Garibaldi, it would not awake my contempt, though Peace has produced many nobler names than either. Don't stare at me like that, Harry. I am fully aware of what I am saying. I have sufficient pride in the name of the Father of his Country, who was much more than a great soldier. But I maintain that Jenner did a higher service for the human race than Washington. When Elias Howe, in his attic at Cambridgeport, discovered the way to make a successful sewing machine, he achieved a greater thing than can be credited to Kossuth. It is not the fashion to enthuse over these men. It is not before such 'musty old grubbers' that the world falls in speechless adoration. To bring out the real enthusiasm of the people, you need a general whose hands are red with the blood of a hundred thousand hearts. Idiots that they are! When will they learn that the men whom they deify are their greatest enemies!"

Most of the beauties of the drive the friends were taking were lost to them on account of the animated nature of their argument, but at this moment a turn

in the road brought them opposite to a particularly lovely sheet of water, and they were compelled to pause for a moment in silent admiration.

"It has just occurred to me what it is that actuates you in the course you are taking," said Mordaunt, with a trace of mischief in his eyes, when they had passed the object which distracted their attention. "You are consumed with envy. You have an intense desire to see your own name emblazoned across the top of some triumphal arch of the future, as one of the most distinguished men of this age. Not being a soldier, you could hope only for the common oblivion, as things are at present arranged. Under the system you advocate, however, the invention which you have just perfected, and for which you are now filing caveats in Europe, would secure you a niche in one of your arches of fame. Yes, you are actuated by the merest selfishness, after all. With your high-flown ideas, you are really no better than the rest of us."

The raillery of his friend, instead of causing merriment in Edmund Darrell's face, only made it grow suddenly graver.

"No, Harry," he said, "I have not the least desire for posthumous admiration. I do not wish any monument to record my name, nor what I have succeeded in accomplishing. It is enough for me to feel that I have made a discovery, or rather a new application of an old one, that will lighten the labors of coming millions. If I had invented a mitrailleuse or a new torpedo that would destroy twenty men where the old munitions of war would kill but one, I could not take equal satisfaction. Yet it is the Krupps who wear the medals, and the school-children forget the

names of the Fultons and the Stephensons almost as soon as they learn them."

Harold Mordaunt declined to become serious, no matter how great the provocation. His view of life was to extract all the honey there was in it and forget the stings as soon as possible.

"Is there *anything* in this beautiful Paris that exactly suits you?" he asked, with delicate irony.

"Yes," replied Darrell, brightening. "This Bois, where I saw yesterday a great company of merry children romping in all the abandon of unrestraint, as they are never allowed to romp on a Sunday in America. I am delighted with this broad stretch of land and water and forest, just at the door of that great municipality, where nature has been interfered with as little as possible consistent with comfort, and where there is no unreasonable limit to the enjoyment of the poorest ragamuffin who has not one foot of other soil where he can woo the sweet repose that come with grass and trees and pure air. This park is to me all admirable. Within a stone's throw of the fortifications that are a continual reminder of a long and causeless quarrel, the poor laborer or the little men and women of the future may easily imagine themselves in the heart of some country district a hundred miles away. The grown-up Frenchman knows how to play—a thing Americans have never learned. I saw here yesterday hundreds of families, from the eldest son or daughter to the baby who had not yet learned to creep. I marked how easily they seemed to forget their troubles and abandon themselves to the ecstasy of the hour. And then I thought—how could I help thinking—of the conscription laws that stand ready to take the best years of those sons,

those years which in our more favored land are regarded as necessary in getting a start in the real business of life. In a worse than useless service he is destined to pass from three to seven years of his youth, learning to kill the neighbors he ought to cultivate as friends. At the command of a ruler whom he did not help to choose, he will go forth to assail men who never injured him or his, giving and taking death-wounds as if they were meritorious things. The mothers and the wives will dim their sad eyes with weeping, the sisters will be condemned to harder toil because of the support taken from them ! And so the frightful, ghastly farce will go on, until—”

He paused so long that his companion felt it almost necessary to prompt him.

“‘Until,’ you were saying—”

“Until some great, unselfish soul arises, strong enough to teach the people the folly of which they have been guilty for ages, virtuous enough to command their confidence and love, and brave enough to sacrifice himself, if need be, to emphasize the lesson he has taught.”

Mordaunt assumed an air of conviction, and struck his companion lightly on the shoulder as if he had just thought of something of the greatest importance.

“My dear fellow,” he cried, with mock enthusiasm, “you are the very man !”

“I !” exclaimed Darrell, starting.

“You, certainly,” was the reply, still couched in an assumed tone of seriousness. “You are all that you describe—brave, unselfish, virtuous, strong. Put yourself at the head of the unorganized rabble of Paris, and lead them out of Egypt ! Become the

leader of a heroic cause! Earn yourself a name among the gods! Throw down this insignificant emperor from his ill-acquired throne. Raze to the ground the marble columns and the brazen images that glorify the real enemies of mankind, and rear others in their places to the fellows who invented spring beds and Ayrshire cows. The corn is ripe for the harvest, oh reaper! Put in your sickle and gather the golden grain!"

Even this ridicule failed to arouse Darrell from the vein into which he had fallen. Fully realizing the ironical nature of his companion's expressions, he seemed to find in them, nevertheless, only food for serious thought.

"The hour cannot be far away," he said, soberly, "and when it comes the Man will be found, as he has always been in the past. I am not equal to the leadership—would to Heaven I were!—but I will fight as best I can in the ranks when the time for action is upon us."

Mordaunt looked alarmed. He could not doubt the perfect sincerity of his friend, and he thought it time to try a more serious vein.

"Edmund Darrell," he said, sharply, "what do you mean? Are you so far gone in this insanity that you would actually enroll yourself with the Paris canaille, if they attempted an outbreak? Do you contemplate the pleasure of standing behind barricades, with a lot of crazy blouse-wearers, to be mowed down by the emperor's cannon, or taken, when the emute is over, to the scaffold? Thank God, Napoleon is too shrewd to allow you the chance! But if the rabble should ever catch him asleep long enough to attempt a rising, would you cast in your lot with them? Is that what you

mean? Zounds, man! It is time somebody talked sense to you!"

Edmund Darrell, quite unruffled, raised his thoughtful eyes to the face of his companion.

"You will see," he said, simply.

He could not, had he used a thousand words, have made a more convincing reply. Mordaunt responded with a look of disgust, and relapsed into silence for several minutes. When he spoke next it was only to direct the cabman to leave the Bois by the Porte Maillot and resume his way back toward the interior of the city.

"It is exasperating," he broke out, some time later, as the carriage entered the Champs Elysées, "to hear a fellow of your natural common sense talk as you do. You are gifted with brains enough to revolutionize an important industry by a wonderful improvement, and yet you must needs wish to throw a magnificently governed empire into chaos. What gang of Anarchists would ever have laid out a beautiful roadway like this one, walled the Seine down there and spanned it with bridges, filled a Louvre with statues and paintings, or carried to a successful close an exposition like that held here three years ago? If the day of your Communists ever comes the people may thank their lucky stars that a monarchy preceded it. You have only to look down this avenue to see the Place de la Concorde—then called the Place de la Guillotine—where your direct predecessors of the last century set up a knife and kept it gory for months with the blood of young and old, men and women, innocent and guilty alike. Is it not a pleasant picture to recall! Wouldn't you like to bring it back again?"

A look of deep pain crossed Darrell's face.

"Think of the provocation those men had," he replied. "Remember the centuries during which they had been treated worse than beasts by their dainty aristocracy. Read once more the 'Tale of Two Cities.' You call the poor of Paris 'canaille ;' but you must not expect to starve, beat and irritate even dogs forever, without counting on retaliation. One would think that the ruling classes might have learned something by that retributive flood, but it appears otherwise."

Mordaunt had also grown serious, and the answer he made was very unlike that which his ordinary good-nature would have promoted.

"Oh, yes, they have learned something," he said, between his teeth. "These long, straight avenues and boulevards show that they learned something, though I admit the lesson was acquired slowly. It is no longer the easy thing it once was to barricade the streets of Paris. Gatling guns would mow down would-be mutineers like stubble before flame. Artillery planted in a spot like that of L' Etoile would clear the streets for miles. They call the emperor in derision 'Napoleon the Little ;' history will substitute for that the appellation of 'the Wise.' For eighteen years France has prospered. Most of that time she has been at peace with other nations, and she has won only glory in the contests which make an exception to the rule. Her present tranquility is due to the far-seeing diplomacy of the man you affect to despise. *Que voulez vous ?* You claim to hate war and to favor progress. How can you without inconsistency desire the overthrow of a ruler who has done so much for his people ? If you must have a row, why not go to Russia, where there is at least a pretext for your interference ! Why do you wish to

spoil this lovely city, just after it has been put in perfect order by good Baron Haussmann?"

It was impossible for Harold Mordaunt to maintain for any great length of time a thoroughly serious mien, and toward the end of his remarks he dropped again into his natural jocosity.

"You have asked a good many questions," replied Darrell, "and I will answer the last one first. We purpose trying revolution on the French at this time because they are much more nearly ripe for a change than the Russians. They are natural politicians. They discuss things; they read the newspapers; they are acquainted with their own history. They know they have dictated terms, and that they can do it again at the right time."

"Yes, and this 'despotic' Napoleon lets them talk on, and print their treasonable articles, and hold their meetings, instead of transporting the whole lot to some French Siberia, as he ought to do," interposed Mordaunt. "To be sure, he occasionally suppresses a journal that gets too outrageous, or invites an especially seditious maker of speeches to favor foreign parts with his presence, but in most cases his enemies are left at liberty to drink to his discomfiture as often as they please. And thus they go on, swallowing treason with their coffee, and buttering their bread with maledictions against the best government they ever had."

"It is the only kind of butter most of them can afford," said Darrell, smiling. "Jacques Bonhomme is not able to have many luxuries, you know."

"Jacques Bonhomme!" cried the other. "Jacques Mauvaishomme, rather! He is a surly, skulking fellow, who dares look no man squarely in the face and is never satisfied with anything. No govern-

ment could make an open-hearted, honest man of him. He is always a guerrilla, never a foe to excite admiration. Butter! What does he want of butter? Brandy is his meat and *café au rhum* is his drink. I tell you if Napoleon ever finds himself compelled to cope with these wretches he may blame the too lenient policy he is pursuing. But here we are at the hotel, and what ought to have been a delightful drive has been quite spoiled by your senseless arguments."

The two friends smiled into each other's faces in a way that seemed to imply that it would take much more than a difference in political belief to strain their warm relations. As they passed up the hotel steps together, Darrell linked his arm in that of Mordaunt.

"I am sorry, Harry," he said, in a more than brotherly way, "if I have spoiled the afternoon for you. I fear I am becoming a very disagreeable companion. Several times lately I have solemnly resolved not to inflict my theories on you—where they are so evidently wasted—but each time something has occurred to arouse my indignation. To-day it was the Arch of Triumph. Saturday it was the emperor reviewing his troops. To-morrow it will be something else. Unless you are willing to risk a repetition of the same thing at unpleasant intervals, we must decide to make our other tours about the city separately."

Mordaunt laughed merrily.

"We will try it a little longer, I think," he said, "before we resort to such a heroic measure. I despair of converting you to anything at all reasonable, but perhaps we can reach some plane of mutual forbearance. We might agree to make only mental

comments where there is the least possibility of a difference of opinion."

Thus chatting they walked up the stairs to their several rooms, at the doors of which they parted to prepare for dinner. Half an hour later they met again, and proceeded to the large dining-room, where they took cosy seats in a corner that had a window from which they could look out upon the public street.

"There is one thing we can never differ about, at least," said Mordaunt, as he finished the soup. "The French are the best cooks in the world, and their wines are unexcelled in quality." As he spoke he filled his glass and raised it. "I am going to propose a toast, though I know I shall have to drink it alone. 'To Napoleon III., Emperor of the French; may his reign be long and glorious!'"

A street band broke in upon the speaker with a somewhat discordant rendering of the Marseillaise Hymn. Darrell smiled significantly as he noted it, and, filling his own glass, he rose reverently in his place.

"To the French nation!" he said, in a voice distinct enough to be heard in any part of the room. "May it soon cast off its royal trappings, and govern itself as a great Communistic Republic!"

Perhaps there was no royalist present who understood the language in which these words were spoken. Perhaps the proverbial willingness of Frenchmen to allow their fellowmen to eat and drink what they please, even to treasonable toasts, may have influenced some who understood and said nothing.

Be that as it may, no one paid the least attention. The two Americans resumed their dinner, and were soon chatting on other subjects as if there had

never been one on which their sentiments were so diametrically opposite. They would have laughed that day had any one predicted that they could ever seriously quarrel.

CHAPTER II.

A MODERN ARCADIA.

In the town of Auburn, in the State of Massachusetts—not the Auburn on the maps of to-day, but a quite different one, now called by another name—a pleasant dwelling stood, like Longfellow's, "somewhat back from the village street," in four or five acres of land reserved for the exclusive use of its occupants. The house was at least fifty years old, as the style of its architecture showed, but there had been many "modern improvements" added since it came into the possession of its present owner, that greatly increased its comfort according to the notions of the present day. The single piazza had been extended till it enclosed three sides of the edifice. Several bay windows of tasty appearance improved the view of the inmates, and lent a piquancy to the exterior of the edifice. Inside, the rooms were large, as was the fashion of our ancestors, and the studding was not too high for easy warming in winter. Stairs ascended occasionally in unexpected localities, and single steps were found where no reason could be assigned for the sudden change in levels. There was no gas, for Auburn had not thought it necessary to indulge in this luxury in any

part of her dominions. Neither was there running water from street mains, for a similar reason. But there were many agreeable looking hanging-lamps ; and a cistern in the attic, supplied by a force-pump, allowed hot and cold water in the kitchen and bath-room, to the undisguised admiration of all the Auburnites who had been permitted to witness its workings. The chimneys were as large as any antiquarian could desire, and the window-panes as small as any devotee of Queen Anne could ask. The furniture was a mixture of old and new styles, and an air of ease, quite different from that of many country homes, pervaded the entire establishment.

The grounds were divided between lawn and garden, with a little grove of pines on one side of the buildings, left nearly in their natural state. If any resident of the town had been asked off-hand to name the most attractive home in it, he would have answered without hesitation, "The Darrell place."

On the particular day when the reader is introduced to this residence—and, by a queer coincidence, it happened to be that same day in June, 1870, when Edmund Darrell and his friend discussed the Arch of Triumph and Communism in the Place de l'Etoile, three thousand miles away—there was a distinct ripple of excitement in the Darrell household. Tom Crowell, the half-grown boy who did the errands and general out-door work on the place, had just arrived from the post-office, bearing a letter with a foreign post-mark. A bright-faced, rosy-cheeked young woman, perhaps twenty-six years of age, had been watching eagerly for his coming, had discerned the missive which he held aloft, and had run beyond the gate in the most undignified manner to meet him.

Snatching the letter from the lad's hand, she tore it open and devoured its contents on the spot, leaning against one of the tall trees that bordered the walk, the better to concentrate her whole attention upon the note. She was of a little more than the usual height, and of a most exquisite form, neither too slender nor too stout. The most noticeable thing about her was her eyes, which were rather large, being brown in color, and shaded by very long lashes. Her hair was drawn back in what we learned many years later to call a "Langtry knot." Dressed in a becoming light robe, bound about her waist with a cord, and cut low enough at the neck to display the outlines of a handsome throat, she made a pretty picture as she turned the leaves and read the not very long epistle.

Arriving at the signature, she suddenly kissed it with a delicious abandon, totally ignoring the presence of Tom Crowell, who still lingered in the vicinity. It was the unconstrained action of a woman who loves, and no stranger who witnessed it could have doubted that the writer was to her the dearest person on earth.

For several minutes the picturesque figure remained leaning against the trunk of the tree, like a lovely statue, with the letter in her hand, and her eyes on the ground in deep meditation. But though the gaze was apparently fixed upon the grass at her feet, the thoughts behind it were much further away. A rapturous smile played about the ripe lips, and an escaping lock of hair hung low over her forehead.

"I hope Mr. Darrell's well, ma'am," said Tom Crowell, at last, despairing of finding any other way to attract his mistress's attention.

The lady looked up radiantly.

"Oh, yes, thank you, Tom. He is very well indeed, and he asks to be remembered to all of you."

The boy's face bore a pleased grin, as he shambled off to tell the news to the other servants, and the lady slowly moved toward the house. But before she reached the door a rush was heard, and two little girls, aged seven and three, came tearing down upon her.

"Mamma! Mamma!" cried the elder, in a state of great excitement. "Read us the letter from papa!"

Mrs. Darrell stooped first to kiss the little faces, and then threw herself upon the ground under one of the tall pines, and read to them extracts from the letter. The younger child, who had only run because her sister did, began to look somewhat bored, but the other seemed aroused to ecstasy by every word. When the reading was finished, she begged as a great favor to be allowed to hold the epistle in her own hands, and to touch with her fingers the dear characters that her father had penned.

"See, Ethel," she said to her sister, putting one arm around the little one's waist. "This is a letter that our darling papa wrote with his own hand! Do you see, at the end, his name? I can read it—'Edmund Darrell.' That's what it says, isn't it, mamma? Our papa, Ethel, who is in Europe, away over the big sea. To think that he remembered us from that long way off! And to know, by a letter that he wrote himself, that he is well and happy!"

The little sister did not seem as much impressed as the elder thought she should be, and an appeal

was made to the mother to impress upon her infantile mind a sense of the importance of the occasion.

Mrs. Darrell took both the children in her arms.

"You must remember, Alice," she said, sweetly, "that Ethel is not as old as you."

Then she noticed that her unappreciative youngest was putting one end of the letter into her mouth, and she rescued it with a little scream.

"Would you destroy papa's letter?" she asked, in a tone of some severity. "The letter that dear papa sent us from so far over the ocean! I am ashamed of you!"

The expression on the little face was something very like defiance, as Miss Ethel realized that she was being scolded.

"Me don't know any papa," was the unexpected reply of the midget.

"Don't know papa!" repeated the mother, in accents of mingled horror and astonishment.

"Of course she doesn't! How could she?"

The latter words were spoken by a tall, slender woman somewhat advanced in years, who had entered at the gate unperceived by the little group under the tree, and now stood several feet away, looking down upon them with no very pleasant expression of countenance. She had the unmistakable air of the "superfluous woman," the gaunt and icy appearance of the typical New England "old maid." Her garments were as sombre as her face, and she leaned for support upon a stout cane which added to the general weirdness of her aspect.

"Of course the child doesn't know her father," repeated the apparition. "How is it possible that she should ever have become acquainted with him?"

"Aunt Mettie," said Mrs. Darrell, warningly, "remember that little ears may hear you !"

The mother, as she said this, rose to her feet. All the brightness that had illumined her countenance had suddenly gone out of it.

"The truth should hurt nobody," retorted the slender female. "Neither of Edmund Darrell's children have ever seen him often enough to recognize his face. I doubt if they would be able to name him if he met them unexpectedly in the street. Don't look at me like that, Anna. You know it is so."

Mrs. Darrell bit her lip. She realized fully the impossibility of muzzling her aunt's tongue. She stooped to kiss the little ones, and to tell Alice to take her sister away to play. But the elder child had heard enough to arouse her indignation, and she stepped angrily before her great-aunt.

"You shall not say such naughty things about my papa !" she cried, stamping her little foot. "I love him. Ethel loves him. Mamma loves him. You are a bad woman, that nobody loves. Why do you come here ?"

"Alice !" called the mother.

"Oh, let her go on," said Miss Mehitable Burton. "Let her go on. She is her father all over." Then she turned to the child. "You need not be such a little spitfire ! How can you tell whether you love your father or not, when you never see him ?"

Mrs. Darrell was in a quandary. She had been brought up in that school where respect for elders is inculcated almost like a religion. Her Aunt Burton had an especial claim on her patience. When her mother had left her an orphan, a dozen years before, this odd woman had supplied to the best of her

ability the place of that parent, and for the next few years she had lived under her aunt's roof. But she was distressed beyond measure at the controversy now in progress, for she dreaded its effect on her excitable child, as well as the suspicion it was likely to arouse in the young mind. For a few moments she stood there, uncertain what it was wisest to do or say.

"It is not true!" cried Alice, taking a step nearer to Miss Burton, and assuming a threatening attitude. "We *do* see papa! He comes whenever he can, and besides we have his picture in the parlor. He writes nice letters to mamma, too. She got one only this morning. Does any one ever write letters to *you*? He has gone to France to do some business that is necessary. You shall not talk about him! I will not stay to hear you!"

The spinster looked down with contempt on the small advocate.

"Your father's steamer sailed six weeks ago," she sneered, "and you have just got your first letter! Well, well! He must be *very* fond of you!"

Again the young champion took up the gauntlet.

"Do you know anything about the sea?" she demanded, in a fury. "It takes nine or ten days to cross it in a steamer. My mamma told me so. Do you think he could get out and mail a letter in the water? Then, when he got there, he had a great deal to do. And, when he wrote, it took another ten days for the letter to get here. You hate my papa, and are always saying ugly things about him. If I was mamma I wouldn't let you come here—*ever*!"

With this parting shot, uttered in a voice that was choking with tears, she ran into the house, dragging Ethel after her, and slammed the door.

The two women followed the vanishing children with their eyes until they disappeared, and then they looked at each other.

"Well, Anna Burton Darrell," said the elder sharply, "has it gone so far that you hesitate whether to ask me to enter your house?"

"Oh, no," was the reply. "But I cannot tell you how distressed I am that you should have spoken as you did before Alice. If you had come here with a purpose to inflict the greatest pain upon me, you could not have hit upon a more successful way."

Miss Burton sniffed the air contemptuously.

"They must find it out, sooner or later. What advantage will it be to bring them up in deceit?"

Anna Darrell flushed suddenly.

"But you are quite wrong, aunt, as I have so often told you. Edmund is very dear to us all. He loves his family—yes, I am sure of it—and does what he thinks is right. At present he is abroad, getting patents on his inventions. He wants to make a fortune, and it is as much for us as for himself, for I am sure he denies us nothing, and his personal habits are not extravagant. You know he bought me this home, putting the deed in my name, and how much he has spent upon it, until it is the most desirable residence in Auburn. I have plenty of help, a pony to drive, a cow for the children, chickens to lay us fresh eggs, and all the money I could possibly find use for. And yet you will persist, on account of a dislike for which you have no real reason, in saying harsh things of my husband. As long as you only say them to me, I can bear it, for I know how unjust they are, but you must not talk again before Alice as you did to-day. I really cannot bear it."

Miss Burton leaned heavily upon the cane she carried, and her eyes shone.

"I suppose that means that you will refuse to receive your father's only sister," she said, viciously.

"Not yet," was the reply. "It surely cannot be necessary for you to say things that excite my children to such anger as Alice exhibited just now. I never saw her in such a fit, and it is not true that she inherits a bad temper from her father, for no one ever heard him use even an impatient word. I do not want you to cease coming, and if there is no other way to arrange it, I will see that the children are kept in another part of the house when you are here."

The sourness of disposition which had become an integral part of the old maid, could not be kept from the surface.

"I don't think you want me to come," she said, as they entered the parlor, where she took, nevertheless, a seat on the edge of one of the chairs, and sat as bolt upright as any ramrod. "Be frank, niece. Say the word, and I promise not to trouble you with my presence again."

"I hope I shall never say that," said Mrs. Darrell. "I am under great obligations to you for the kind care you gave me when I was left without protectors. I cannot forget what you did for me as a child. But, aunt, I am now a wife and a mother. I feel a sort of guilt to have permitted my child to listen to such words about her father as you have more than once used in her presence. This morning it was worse than usual, and I cannot endure it."

In spite of the firmness of her tone, tears filled her eyes. The dilemma presented to her was a very sad one to the girl, for she had no intimate friendships

outside the narrow circle of her relations, consisting solely of Miss Burton and the spinster's bachelor brother, Ephraim.

"You are a Burton, and you ought to have some sense," responded the aunt, more kindly. "Had you begun right with that man you could have taught him his duty, but now I fear it is too late. It may be necessary for him to travel as much as he does, though to tell the truth, I don't believe it. But, if you are his wife, he could sometimes take you with him. What is the matter? Is he ashamed of you? He could hardly treat you with less respect if you were—"

A sudden gleam in the eyes of her niece warned her that she might go too far in this direction.

"I tell you again that I am satisfied, and I cannot see why you should trouble yourself so much."

"You are satisfied!" repeated Miss Burton. "Do you think you can make any one believe that? What sort of a married life is it that you lead? He is gone months at a time. He tells you whatever story he pleases, and you swallow it."

"I love him and trust him," said the wife, proudly.

"Well, I don't," was the sharp reply. "You do not know what he is doing these long months that you never set eyes on him."

Mrs. Darrell reddened, but she did not wince.

"I understand your insinuations," she answered, "and I repel them absolutely."

Miss Burton leaned toward her, and spoke in a low voice.

"If I could show you—" she began.

"You cannot—you know you cannot!" cried the wife, greatly roused. "It is cruel of you to make

such statements. I cannot listen to them. Aunt, you must excuse me."

For the first time in all their acquaintance, she vacated the room, overcome by her feelings, and Miss Burton had the pleasure of escorting herself to the door.

But the seed—the cursed, imperceptible, prolific seed of suspicion had been planted; and it was to grow until its always bitter fruit should load the spreading branches of the tree!

CHAPTER III.

"WAS IT FOR THIS YOU MARRIED?"

Miss Mehitable Burton was a well known figure in Auburn, and her brother Ephraim was hardly a less one. Together for nearly forty years the couple—both hopeless wanderers from matrimonial felicity—had lived under the same roof, attended the same church, held the same opinions, eaten the same food. It was generally understood in Auburn that Miss Burton was the "man of the house," as the term was used, and that her brother was nothing more than her shadow, executing her orders as if he were a hired man instead of the real owner of record of all the property they enjoyed in common. When their father died he willed every penny of his estate equally to his two sons, leaving it to them to provide for the solitary daughter, if they might choose to do so. The younger son, Anna's father, took his part of the money to the city, invested it in business,

made quite a name for a few years, and then saw everything swept away in one of those financial crashes that come periodically to clear the monetary horizon, as cyclones do to clear the atmosphere of the Western States. He returned to Auburn one day and announced to his sister—for even then it was recognized that Ephraim only did as she bade him—that he had sunk his capital and wanted to raise twenty-five thousand dollars with which to recover his position. Tradition had it that when she refused to risk the amount, he went back with his heart broken, and only lived six months. His young widow struggled along on the proceeds of a small life insurance policy for a few years, and then she, too, gave up the fight. Anna was ten years of age when her Aunt Mettie took her to her solemn home in Auburn, where the stillness and the absence of other young people bore heavily upon her naturally buoyant spirits.

Miss Burton was now, according to the Auburn standard, a rich woman, always remembering that she had not a single penny's worth of property standing in her own name. Ephraim Burton was supposed to be worth rising one hundred thousand dollars, carefully invested in securities of unquestioned solidity. He always demanded the full pound of flesh that was stipulated in his carefully drawn bonds, and if a little extra flowage of blood resulted, surely that was the fault of the improvident men who did not know enough to manage their affairs successfully. He was a gentle, harmless sort of octopus, without the least ill feeling for any person in the world, but who had certain business ideas not wholly peculiar to himself, which were wholly opposed to anything like extensions of time on

notes, or mercy to needy debtors in any other form. He cultivated, of the acres he owned, only a little garden that supplied his table with vegetables, and managed by the sweat of other men's brows not merely to live but to add handsomely to his earthly possessions. All that he had was his by the law, but it was his sister's as far as its disposition was concerned. When some farmer or small manufacturer wanted an "accommodation" he never went to Ephraim to ask it. He saw Miss Darrell and made known the circumstances of the case and received the stereotyped reply that she would see what her brother had to say. Every one of them knew that she would tell Ephraim whether to lend the money or refuse it, and that altering the laws of the Medes and Persians would be a very simple thing compared with getting her to reverse a decision.

But there was one part of the business with which Miss Burton always professed to have nothing at all to do. When the amounts lent were to be called in, and the borrowing parties were not ready to pay, she preferred to have her brother bear the entire brunt of the affair. Her only reply to those who called on such errands was, that she knew nothing about it, and that they must see Ephraim. They all learned in time that the cogs of a mill-wheel were quite as much open to argument as he, but the first time each one made this discovery there was apt to be a very interesting scene at the Burton homestead.

The speculator of to-day, who has seen his hundreds turn to thousands with one tick from the electric current—and perhaps thousands turn to hundreds with equal rapidity—may smile at those who think themselves content with the slow accumulation of money at six or seven per cent. But

Ephraim Burton knew that sums so invested would double in a dozen years, and that the result thus obtained would double again in another dozen years and so on indefinitely. He was not averse, either, to accepting a larger rate where the security was satisfactory, and his accumulations grew like the peach in Tommy's orchard, until he was one of the solid men of his town. At the breaking out of the civil war he had seen his opportunity, like many another forehanded patriot. He "had confidence in the government," and gathering in all the money he could raise, he bought United States bonds, payable in gold, though purchased with inflated currency, and bearing gold interest at the rate of seven and three-tenths per cent. Perhaps he took a hand also at some other things done in those days, of which the less said the better.

Several years after the end of the war he noticed that the farms on which he still held mortgages were deteriorating in price, and he set systematically about calling in all of his loans on that species of property.

A specimen scene at the Burton house occurred on the day that Miss Burton had the unpleasant experience with her niece recorded in the preceding chapter, and a brief resumé of it may be of interest to the reader. She was sitting silently with her brother in their little sitting-room late in the afternoon, when a knock was heard at the door. Miss Burton, as was her habit, went to meet the visitor, who proved to be one of the townsmen named Taylor, on whose land Mr. Burton—begging pardon for a title which the smallest boy in Auburn would have scorned to use—held an overdue mortgage.

Miss Burton bowed quietly, and allowed the new-

comer to enter the room, where her brother rose and offered him one of the wooden chairs.

"It's Mr. Taylor," was Miss Burton's sole remark, as she resumed the position by the window which she had recently vacated.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Taylor," said Ephraim cordially.

Mr. Taylor was not as calm as was either his host or hostess. He was in fact considerably distressed, and his face was a mirror of his emotions. He hesitated how to begin his errand, and looked askance at Miss Burton, who seemed oblivious of his presence.

"It's been a fine day," Ephraim said at last, to encourage him. "I thought at one time there was going to be a shower, but it cleared off again. The wind veered around to the south'ard, and I guess that'll keep it off a spell longer."

"I see you've advertised my place for sale," said Mr. Taylor, thinking it as well to come to the point at once.

"Well, yes, sir," responded Ephraim, cheerfully. "Yes, sir. I—I have, sir."

The visitor repressed his excitement with difficulty.

"I can't help saying I am surprised," he rejoined. "It is the first time the interest has been behind, and you have had my note for eleven years."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," assented the unmoved Ephraim.

"I can't get it before next month, do the best I can," continued the debtor. "I came and told you so. I have had sickness in the house, and there was a good deal of medicine to buy. You know my youngest boy had the fever."

"Yes, sir ; yes, sir," said Ephraim, mildly. "I hope he is better now, sir. He is a fine boy, sir."

The father was momentarily mollified by this compliment, for it touched him in a tender spot, but he returned to the subject at issue.

"I shall bring you the interest next month, but the cost of the advertising and serving will come hard on me. When I came and told you how it was, I certainly thought you meant to wait."

"Yes, sir ; yes, sir."

Mr. Taylor glanced at Miss Burton, in the vain hope that there might be help in that direction, but she sat like a graven image, with her face turned toward the street.

"If I get the interest by next week will you stop the proceedings?" he asked, desperately.

Ephraim coughed mildly behind his hand.

"The—hem !—the note itself is also overdue," he answered, slowly.

"The note ! You don't mean to press the payment of the principal !" exclaimed Mr. Taylor, the perspiration breaking out all over him. "Why, the security is perfect. The note doesn't half cover what I paid for the place. You know that as well as I."

"Yes, sir ; yes, sir," came the exasperating answer. "I know it, sir. But I am calling in all my loans in Auburn, to invest them in another place. Yes, sir."

Mr. Taylor looked at Ephraim Burton, and then at his sister by the window again, who might have been made of wood for all she seemed to notice anything that was going on around her. He was momentarily overpowered by the situation.

"If you demand the principal of the note I owe

you, at this time, it will simply ruin me," he said, in freezing tones. "I could no more raise that money than—than I could fly to the moon. I put six hundred dollars in there to begin with, and I have spent as much more in improvements. I shall lose it all."

"Yes, sir."

An inclination to launch into vituperation came over Mr. Taylor, but he repressed it with the greatest difficulty.

"You can't mean it," he said, instead, trying to force a smile. "We've—we've been good friends too long."

"Yes, sir."

"To be turned out of our home at my time of life would be mighty hard on me and my family."

"Yes, sir. It is rather hard, sir."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Taylor. "Then you won't do it! I thought you couldn't be so hard-hearted. I will bring your interest promptly on July 15, and I won't ever get behind again, even if I have to sell a cow, though I should hate to do that, as milk is now our main support." He rose from his chair, much relieved. "You won't do anything about it now, will you?"

"Yes, sir," piped Ephraim. "I shall have to—to foreclose, sir. I—in fact—hem!—I need the money, sir."

Mr. Taylor could stand it no longer. When the last grain of hope was thus ruthlessly taken away, he poured out the vials of his wrath on the head of his oppressor, with all the fury of a desperate man.

"Why, you old skinflint," he cried, "you ought to be tarred and feathered! You haven't as much heart in you as there is in a piece of stone! Need this money, you old liar! You have enough laid

by to bury a thousand old mummies like you, and that is all the use you'll ever have for any of it! You have robbed the poor men of this town for forty years, taking their little savings to swell your own pile, driving widows and orphans to the almshouse! If you'd had your deserts they'd have hung you to one of your trees long ago, or burned you in a bonfire made of your own mortgages. If I were to break this chair over your head, the people of Auburn would pass me a vote of thanks. You can't frighten me again. Before I'd ask a favor of you I'd take my wife and children out on the highway and see them starve and freeze there. You miserable, cowardly, dried-up old fool!"

"Yes, sir; yes, sir," came the low reply, unaccompanied by the least symptom of annoyance.

The old man's mildness partially disarmed the other, in spite of himself. It is no easy matter to continue kicking at vacancy.

"You know," said Mr. Taylor, dropping his voice, "that I can't borrow anything in Auburn on that farm; that all the men who have been in the habit of lending money here are going out of the business. It is my home. Three of my children were born there. We—my wife and I—have made every sacrifice to keep it. I can't do a good day's work, as I once could, and the milk is about all we have to look to. You know that."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir."

"And still you intend to foreclose?"

"Yes, sir."

A desire to murder this man—to rid the earth of such a monster, crept over the unhappy debtor, and he tore himself from the house by main force lest it should overpower him. It was a question for a

second or so whether he would go before he struck that heavy chair across Ephraim Burton's bald head and sent him to a place where he had, mayhap, an account of his own overdue, and not the where-withal to meet the obligation.

The old man had no idea how near he had been to death, and even had he realized it, might not have altered a single word or action. He was perfectly used to such pleadings and threats, and their effect upon him was never greater or less than in the present instance. Neither did the excited words and actions of Mr. Taylor have any effect upon the stone statue at the window. Miss Burton did not turn her face toward the men once during their conversation, nor did she move for some time after her brother had risen to fasten the door and resumed his seat. When she did speak, her words had no reference to that occurrence.

In such an atmosphere as this, Anna Darrell had passed the few years preceding her marriage. Her aunt tried to instil into her mind that there was little worth thinking about in this world except bonds, mortgages and notes of hand. But there was another lesson that she used every endeavor to teach the young girl, and that was the "folly" of marriage. She never tired of telling her of instances where wedded life had turned out badly, and where single blessedness had been proved to be by far the preferable state. It was her dearest hope that Anna would be a credit to this line of teaching, and when the day came that the inevitable was made apparent, she received a blow to her pride from which she never recovered.

Mehitable Burton had seen not less than sixty winters, and her temper had been bitten by the

frosts of every one of them. That softening of the impulses that seems inseparable from the clinging arms of one's own children, had, of course, never come to her. Rumor had it that she had had her "affair" in the long ago, when very young, with a youth who had passed a summer vacation at Auburn, and who had jilted her after the wedding garments were procured. Be that as it may, she was a most inveterate husband-hater.

At first, being so young, Anna seemed to fall in readily with the ideas which she heard preached so constantly. But she had hardly reached her eighteenth birthday, when the traditional young prince came to the village—in the person of Edmund Darrell—and the citadel capitulated all the easier because so totally unused to the arts of attack or defense.

How Anna managed to see Edmund alone long enough to listen to his tale of love, was a mystery in Auburn, but listen she did and an engagement was made. He was anxious for an immediate union, and though she knew full well that her aunt would refuse her consent, the girl promised that it should be as her lover desired. It was an Auburn witticism that the Burtons were equal to ten ordinary people—Miss Mehitable being the figure "1" and Ephraim the "0," and no thought of asking her uncle's opinion entered Anna's head. But one very warm day, in more senses than one, Anna brought her promised husband to her aunt's door, and told her the errand on which they had come.

"We are going to be married, aunt, dear," she said, with that bold front of the prospective bride which will never cease to be a marvel. "You have taken the place of a mother to me, and I want you to give us your consent and blessing."

The silent rage of Miss Burton at this announcement was pitiable to see. She grew very white around the lips, staggered slightly, seemed about to swoon, and then, recovering herself, pointed speechlessly to the door with a significant gesture, and turned her back upon them.

On the whole this did not greatly surprise the young girl, and she was too happy to allow it to distress her much at the time. She went immediately with Edmund to the residence of one of the local clergymen, where they were, in the phraseology of the service, "made one." From the parsonage the couple proceeded to rooms in the Auburn House that Darrell had engaged, where, after shyly allowing her husband to snatch his first kiss, Anna wrote a note to Miss Burton, asking her to send her effects as soon as convenient, stating that she expected to continue to reside in the village, at least for the present, and expressing the hope that her aunt would think better of it later and come to see her. She said she would not ask forgiveness, feeling conscious of no wrong, but trusted that the abruptness of her action would be excused, as the circumstances of her husband's business had made haste necessary. Before night every person in Auburn knew of the affair, and for the next month and more it became the basis of most of the gossip of the neighborhood.

A sweeter or more modest girl than Anna Burton never breathed, but like all brides whom we have ever known or of whom we have any record, Anna Darrell faced the world without the tremor of an eyelid. The wedded couple took their meals, by her suggestion, at the public table, and the number of transient diners was for a time greatly increased

in consequence. They rode all over the vicinity daily, and it was the universal verdict that they were a very fine-looking pair. This line of policy turned the public tide in their favor, with the young folks, at least, for there had been a little wave of sentiment against them at the start. But now Aunt Mehitable was voted an old dunce for compelling them to get married in this manner, and the cards, which were soon sent out in quantities, were responded to by the population en masse.

Mr. Darrell, though in fact much bored by these ceremonies, succeeded in disguising his feelings, and created a distinctly favorable impression. The young eligibles of the town, who had been disposed to consider his action a slight on their legitimate right to the first pick of the Auburn beauties, were obliged to admit that he was a thoroughly likeable fellow, with no airs about him. The young ladies came away charmed. After three days more had passed, if there were any villagers who still sympathized with Miss Burton, they were too aged and insignificant a part of the social world to be worth noticing.

In using the expression "sided with Miss Burton," the author does not wish to create an erroneous impression. Not only did that lady decline to rehearse her griefs to any one whatever, but she frowned upon the attempts of a few would-be sympathizers to draw her into a discussion in relation to the affair. Her always stern countenance may have been a shade more forbidding than before, whenever she took her stick and hobbled along the public road. She may have snapped up the grocer's boy or the woman who came to do her weekly house-cleaning a little more sharply than of yore,

but not one word in relation to the departed niece issued from her lips. Several over-zealous partizans shook their heads and sighed whenever they met her, as if to convey some grain of comfort to the stricken soul, but she might have been deaf and blind for any sign she gave.

On the fourth day, however, the man of whom she had bought all her fish for a quarter century was imprudent enough to remark, as he weighed out a mackerel for her, "We all have our troubles, Miss Burton." And the next week and ever after, she patronized the new fish dealer across the way, whose coming into town she had denounced, two months before, as a sin and a shame.

At the end of a fortnight from the date of his marriage, Auburn became aware, one morning, that Mr. Darrell had gone to Boston, leaving his young bride at the hotel. The dying flames of gossip were fanned into a momentary flicker by this announcement, for the explanation that "business" required his attention did not satisfy the villagers. The universal sentiment was that in that case he should have taken Anna with him. She had never been anywhere since her childhood, and the opportunity was one that they all agreed she should have seized. Perhaps, however, some argued, he had only gone for a day or two and she preferred to wait till they could take a longer journey together. But the day or two passed, and several days after those, and still he did not return. Then the Auburnites grew quite united in the belief that Darrell was not treating his wife with proper consideration, and a minority party arose which began to hint openly that there had probably been a "falling out" between the pair.

Mr. Upham, the landiord of the hotel, contributed his quota to the general information by stating that Mr. Darrell had paid in advance for everything on a liberal scale, and had left word that the best mare in the stable, to which his wife had taken a fancy, should be reserved for her exclusive use. This staggered the minority party a little, but, like all similar birds of ill-omen, they bided their time. It soon began to be generally conceded that Darrell was in fault. When an entire month passed without his return, vague rumors of an impending divorce were put in circulation. The growing anxiety which Anna tried in vain to hide, was not omitted in making up the total.

The young man in the post-office noticed that the post-marks on the infrequent letters that Mrs. Darrell received, showed her husband to be travelling, and one of them was dated as far off as Denver. "What a shame," cried the gossips, "that he should take a trip like that alone, when it would have been so delightful for Anna, poor thing!" But when the excitement was at its greatest height, and talk of a public expression of sympathy had begun, the train one morning brought to the village no less a person than Darrell himself, who hastened with all speed from the railway station to the hotel. Anna, who sat at her window, saw him coming, and, rushing down the stairs, flew into his outstretched arms. The mutual embrace was so tender that all speculations were incontinently demolished, and Auburn was plunged into a state of stupid wonder.

The husband's stay lasted but three days. And from that time on he visited her but seldom, often remaining, when he came, but a few hours, never more than a night, at the longest. She never left the

village, either with or without him, but there was no evidence of regret visible in her face or manner, and the towns-people at last found speculation about the matter a dull pastime. That Darrell behaved oddly they all admitted, but as they could make nothing of it, they gradually took up with new themes. Anna lived alone in her pretty rooms at the hotel for some months, varying the monotony by driving about the town and vicinity. The purchase of the house in which she was introduced to the reader, and the extensive additions made upon it, excited only temporary interest. But the next spring the birth of a baby, while its father was away in a distant part of the country, called forth much sympathetic comment.

Anna was alone with her medical man and her servants, reinforced for the occasion by a nurse, when this event occurred. As soon as it was known in the village, however, Miss Burton astonished Anna and everybody else, by hobbling into the house and assuming the position of general manager of everything, precisely as if no estrangement had ever taken place.

"Things are in a fearful hubbub here," she remarked to her niece, as she returned from an inspection of the departments, "and I am going to set them to rights."

"Yes, dear aunt, if you will be so kind," faltered Anna, much relieved. "Edmund intended to be here, but he is very busy, you know, and—"

Aunt Burton sniffed like the war horse of Job.

"Busy!" she snapped. "Busy! At a time like this! Ah-h-h!"

Her opinion of Edmund Darrell in particular and

of mankind in general was condensed into that awful monosyllable.

Anna was only nineteen years of age, but she had a remarkable physique and an excellent constitution, and all went well. Telegrams had been dispatched to the husband, but the child was five days old when he arrived. The frequent inquiries that Anna made during this interim grew quite plaintive as time went on, though she fully believed—poor little woman—that she concealed her anxiety from those about her. When he came at last, and was so sorry, and explained how he had been moving about so from place to place that the telegrams had never reached him, she was repaid for the long delay. And when he took up the baby and kissed it, and said it was as pretty as its mother—a polite fiction—she laughed so heartily that the nurse came and bundled him out of the room without ceremony.

Darrell stayed in Auburn nearly a week this time, though any one could see that the place was surpassingly dull for him. He walked the long piazzas, smoking innumerable cigars, and enduring his martyrdom with what resignation he could muster. Aunt Burton never spoke pleasantly to him once in all the time, and grew all the more nettled when he showed that he had not the least intention of minding it.

"I shall express my opinion by-and-by, of the way he has acted," she said to Anna, when she could sit up. "The next time he comes here I will give him one talking to, if he never gets another."

"Dear aunt," replied Anna, much pained, "if you have any regard for me whatever, you will do nothing of the kind. I can imagine no way in which you could grieve me more. Edmund has invented

something, and is attending to the patents. He has a great deal on his mind. I understand the cause of his absences, and I am perfectly satisfied. You must see that he loves me very much. He paid a great deal for this house, and I have a book on the Auburn bank with more money than I need to use. You must not—no, you really must not—say anything to annoy him.”

The maiden lady had a strange expression as she looked at the pleading face before her.

“Was it for this you married?” she queried, sharply. “You had a good home, and you knew that every penny Ephraim and I have put by was to have been yours. You had all you wanted without this idiocy!”

As harsh as were the words, Miss Burton had relented, and Anna knew it. She stroked the rough old hand she held in hers.

“No, aunt, I did not have everything I wanted. I did not have Edmund—nor—nor *this*.”

It was with a very pretty action that she indicated the baby lying by her in its cradle, while a bright wave of pinkish color swept over her pallid face.

Since that day seven years had come and gone, and Darrell's “pressing business” had kept him from home in an increasing, rather than lessening ratio. The second child, born more than four years after the first one, was two months old when he first saw it, he having taken a trip to South America sometime before its advent was expected, and been delayed longer than he intended. But custom is everything, and the wife gave no outward sign of repining for what she had never known. She devoted herself to the care of her little family, perhaps not more unhappy than the average of her

class. She wrote weekly letters to the latest addresses she could obtain, and read with deep pleasure the semi-occasional answers that he found time to send.

Aunt Mehitable only made herself a member of the household on the most important occasions, but she was at other times a frequent visitor, and it is not believed that she ever came and went without having something very cutting to say of Edmund Darrell. Anna became quite habituated to this as well as to the other trials of her life, and would have uttered no protest had the remarks been confined to her ears alone. But when little Alice began to notice, the wife's loyalty aroused the old spirit in her, and, as we have seen, it brought her into sharp collision with her waspish aunt.

CHAPTER IV.

"MY NATURE DEMANDS SYMPATHY."

The Auburn gossips, who were in such a state of wonder at the peculiar conduct of Mr. Edmund Darrell, would have given their ears, almost, if they could have been, as can the reader, listeners at a conversation between that gentleman and his friend Harold Mordaunt, in the city of Paris, a few days after the one in which they held their argument over the question of the relative advantages of Royalty and Communism, apropos of the monument in the Place de l' Etoile.

It was morning, and the lovely city shone again in all the beauties of early summer. They left their hotel in the neighborhood of the Colonne Vendome, and strolled over to the Luxembourg gardens by the way of the Pont Neuf. At Henry's statue they paused, and leaning together over the parapet, they watched for awhile the little passenger steamers that run from Charrenton to St. Cloud, the fishermen who sit all day in expectation that is seldom realized, and the loading and unloading of the freight barges.

Then they continued their course through winding and narrow streets left at the time when a general demolition in the interest of improvement seemed to threaten the whole of Paris. Mordaunt, who knew the city from centre to circumference, told many stories of the houses by which they passed, and of historic events that had taken place in their vicinity. In this building such-and-such a famous man had once resided; on this corner an affray took place between the partisans of this cause and that; here so-and-so stood when he harangued the citizens on a great occasion; and through this lane a royal victim passed on his way to the imprisonment which ended only with his death.

Darrell was usually a very attentive listener to reminiscences of this kind, which formed indeed one of the chief charms of his strolls with his old friend; but on this particular morning he showed an absent-mindedness that was not lost on the other. Feeling sure that he had said nothing to antagonize him on any of his pet notions, Mordaunt was somewhat puzzled to find a reason. He said nothing in relation to the matter, until they had reached the gardens and secured a comfortable seat under one

of the shade trees that bordered a semi-retired cross-walk. Then he asked, with abruptness :

"Edmund, what is it?"

Darrell, who was at the moment in a brown-study, looked up.

"I do not understand you, Harry," he said.

"Why, your pre-occupation this morning is something marvelous. I have been talking in a steady stream to you for the last hour on the most interesting themes, and I doubt if you can repeat a word that I have said."

Darrell recognized for the first time the truth of the statement. For a minute he made no reply. Then he put his hand on his companion's knee, with the confidence of years of friendship, and replied :

"I had a letter from my wife this morning. It always makes me dull to get a letter from her."

He paused, apparently to allow his companion to interject some comment if he desired, but there was none.

"I know, Harry," he continued, "that you are growing to consider me an eccentric individual. My married life has hitherto been a sealed book to all my acquaintances. I have long felt that it would be a relief if I could speak of it to one as deeply attached to me as I think you are. And yet, I have a presentiment that such confidence would be followed by a loss of your esteem that I should regret. Still, in spite of all, if you will listen to the strange story of my married life, I will tell it to you."

So intimate had been the relations of these two men, that Mordaunt had reason to believe this matter of wedlock the only secret between them. As school-mates they had been inseparable chums, and when,

in later life Harry had gone on his long voyages, they had been the most faithful of correspondents. Every item in relation to his business successes and failures, every movement, in short, that he made, had been told by Edmund to Harry—with this significant exception. Until the moment just past he had never in the remotest degree alluded to having a wife at all, in all his conversations and correspondence with him. He knew, through other means, that his friend was probably married, but he was not absolutely sure even of that. He had had letters from him mailed in the little town of Auburn, and had suspected that the mysterious wife was located in that place. There was no reason for him to attempt to enter upon a domain so jealously guarded, and he had never by a word or hint betrayed his suspicions. Now that Darrell had of his own accord offered to open the gates, however, he was not averse to seeing the interior.

"I will listen to anything you wish to tell me, Edmund," was his quiet reply.

Darrell cleared his throat, as if the words he was about to utter required an especially free passage.

"You knew me from childhood to manhood," he began. "Can you say, up to the time when we parted, that you ever saw me show the least interest in any woman?"

"No. You were rather noted, if anything, for a contrary tendency."

"Exactly. But now I am interested—intensely so—in two. One of them is my wife, the mother of my two children. The other—"

He hesitated, and Mordaunt elevated his eyebrows.

"The other—should have been."

Mordaunt nodded his head sympathizingly.

"'Twas ever thus," he mused. "How much better to do as I have done, marry none at all."

"No," responded **Darrell**, "not for me. My nature, though it was late in developing, demands love—feminine love; sympathy—feminine sympathy. It is necessary to have some one who will share my views, my hopes, my aspirations, and that some one must be of the gentler sex. I am as incomplete without it as one of the halves of a sphere. Such a partner a man should find in the woman he weds. It has been my misfortune to have to find it elsewhere."

He sat silent so long after this that his companion felt the necessity of prompting him.

"How happened it that you married?"

"How?" He started at the question. "I will tell you. Within a week after you first left me I met the woman who aroused in me the only passion of my life. She was a year younger than I, but with a brain fit for one ten years older. I was in love with her from the beginning. Before I had known her two months all the current of my thoughts had undergone a change. She was an agnostic; I became one. She was an iconoclast; I broke every image—but hers—that I had ever set up. She was a communist—opposed to the rule of any aristocracy, either of men or money; I followed her into every labyrinth. When we seemed to have grown inseparable, when we had become one in soul, I found the courage to ask the question that lay nearest my heart. And this girl, to whom my entire being was attached as by chains of silver, expressed the greatest surprise at my declaration, and gave me the finishing blow by announcing that she was soon to be

united to a noted professor of political economy whose adopted daughter she was—a man twice her age and without the least physical attractions.”

Mordaunt shook his head slowly.

“And even that did not cure you of your Communism?” he asked.

“Certainly not. My views had grown with slow conviction, my love was a spontaneous outburst over which I had no control. Only a man who has never been in love can afford to laugh at its effects. When Miss Casson told me my hopes were impossible of fruition, I could not conceal the terrible pain that it gave me. She realized all at once what I was about to suffer. She told me that Professor Marlin had taken her when a friendless child and educated her as if she were his own daughter; and when he had asked her to marry him, admitting the inequality of the match in many respects, she had not known how to refuse him, though she had told him frankly that she felt no such love as she had always supposed ought to go with marriage.

“I think it first came into her mind at that moment that she held a dearer place in her heart for me than she had ever realized. Forgetting the reserve that usage exacts, she threw her arms about my neck and sobbed out her sorrow at the unhappiness she was compelled to inflict upon me. She vowed to be to me, notwithstanding her marriage, a friend for life in every way consistent with duty and honor. In the midst of this trying situation the Professor opened the door.”

The listener gave a low whistle of astonishment and interest.

“The Professor, you must understand,” pursued Darrell “was no ordinary man. He was a philoso-

pher, not only in theory but in practice. It probably never occurred to him to propose revolvers or rapiers, or even to announce with violent language that the sight he had witnessed would bring his engagement to an end. He merely apologized in all sincerity for the abruptness of his entrance, saying that he had understood from the servant that Miss Casson was alone; and he was about to retire when I arose, and, with considerable confusion, insisted on being heard. He thereupon took a chair, and I was about to begin my story, when Miss Casson took the words from my mouth and told him everything. Upon which the Professor, in the most open-hearted manner, expressed his regret at my disappointment and his approval of the conduct of his fiancée. 'We shall be glad,' he said, 'to welcome you on all occasions to our home, and hope you will consider yourself, whenever convenient, a veritable member of the household. Our marriage is set for five weeks from to-day. The ceremony will be as simple as possible consistent with that formality which it is necessary under the present laws to observe. Only the witnesses required will be present, and I shall be glad if you will consent to make one of them.' The calmness of his demeanor completely disconcerted me. Murmuring something about my appreciation of the honor, I withdrew from the house, Miss Casson kissing me again in the presence of her promised husband, and leaving the impression of her still wet cheeks upon my own."

Mordaunt took occasion to remark, at this point in the story, that if either of the gentlemen interested had been at all like himself it would have had a very different outcome. In spite of all the philosophy in the world, he said, few men would care to see their

sweetheart kiss a fellow who had just declared his love for her, and fewer yet could quietly accept such endearments in the face of a successful rival.

"You will better understand how completely crushed I was," continued Darrell, not seeming to notice the interruption, "when I say that I immediately abandoned my business and went into the country, leaving no one but my foreman aware of my address. After wandering about for a week, I found myself in Auburn, a village that seemed sufficiently secluded for my purpose, which was to avoid meeting any one who knew me. I installed myself at the hotel of the place, hoping in the quietness of this rural spot to outgrow my disappointment.

"I took long walks through the woods and fields. One day, while strolling aimlessly in this manner, I heard screams of terror. Running to the place from which the sounds emanated, I saw a young girl fleeing across a meadow, pursued by a vicious horse. It was but the work of a moment to spring over the fence and rush between the girl and the animal, and, by brandishing my heavy cane, to turn his attention from his object until she was safely out of his reach. The horse was really very dangerous, and that evening was killed by its owner. The girl I rescued is now my wife."

Mordaunt's face had become as sunny as his friend's was serious. He declared the story positively romantic, and said he should certainly write it out for his favorite magazine.

"I do not know what possessed me," pursued the narrator. "Idleness had no doubt something to do with it. But I found myself making arrangements to meet this girl on one pretext and another, until there was rarely a day that we did not see each

other. And you must not judge of Anna Burton's conduct on the basis of the rules that prevail in larger communities. There is, in many of these quiet New England villages, an almost Arcadian simplicity still, in the relations of the sexes. Perhaps no greater average virtue can be found in civilized lands, and yet the young women do not think it necessary to hedge themselves in with the thousand and one ceremonies that prevail elsewhere. A man is not, in their eyes, a necessarily dangerous creature, and as long as no suspicion exists in relation to his character, their meetings are quite unconstrained.

"But there was a double reason why Anna must meet me surreptitiously, if at all. She was an orphan, and her aunt, with whom she lived, was a maiden lady possessed of a deadly hatred of all my sex, which she had endeavored by every means in her power to instill into the mind of her niece. This Anna told me, in a perfectly artless manner, in one of our walks, as an explanation of the reason why she had not invited me to her home. Our acquaintance grew rapidly. I was not too blind to notice—don't think me egotistical—that I was making a deeper impression upon her plastic mind than I had intended; and I was on the point of announcing my departure, when a newspaper that I chanced to pick up at the hotel precipitated all the mischief that has since occurred."

"A newspaper!" repeated Mordaunt.

"Yes; I had avoided looking at a single periodical since I had left Boston, but for some inscrutable reason I happened to pick up this one, as I sat in the office of the Auburn House, one morning after breakfast. The first thing that met my eye was the

announcement, in the society column, that the marriage of Professor Marlin and Miss Laura Casson would take place at the Parker House on the following Wednesday. The most harmless of paragraphs, you will say, when you know that I was already aware of the date, and that the item contained nothing whatever that was at all new to me. But here is one of the peculiarities of the human mind. Though I knew that the marriage was to occur on the date and at the place mentioned, I did not relish having the fact thrust in my face in this fashion. It had the effect upon me of a challenge, if not of an intentional insult. All that I might have felt and said when the Professor came into the room and found his sweetheart's arms about my neck, swept over me like a flood. My mind began to be filled with revengeful ideas. I thought of taking the first train to Boston and doing something—I did not know what—to stop the ceremony. It seemed as if I could not live after she had given herself to that man, whom I had every reason to know she would never love as she could have loved me. I grew very indignant as I thought of her sacrificing herself to pay the debt of gratitude which he had cunningly charged up against her. Then a new idea gradually worked its way into my overheated brain. I could not prevent Miss Casson's marriage; could I not do something to convince her that I did not care? What? There was only one way. I must also marry!"

Harry Mordaunt could not suppress an exclamation at this statement. Even to his light mind there was something quite blood-curdling in it.

"Yes, that was how it came about," said Darrell, growing quite ghastly at the reminiscence. "All

night I struggled with myself, but could find no rest. When I met Anna in the morning she remarked upon my heavy eyelids. In a moment of madness I carried out my resolve, and she, unhappy girl—already won, and believing herself the cause of my *distract* manner—accepted me without pretence or coquetry. A hasty union was necessarily part of my plan, and to this she also consented. The next day we were made one—or at least so the clergyman solemnly declared—and I sent the news with feverish impatience to the woman I loved, only hoping it would give her a tithe of the agony her approaching nuptials had caused me. The aunt of my young wife disowned her on account of what she had done, and while I could never hope to give her the affection she deserved, I resolved, as I took her to my rooms in the hotel, that she should never learn from me the terrible sin of which she had been made the victim.

"With all the tenderness of a bride she gave me a thousand pangs for the despicable part I was playing. I went through the next week as best I could. We ate at the hotel table and drove out every day, the cynosure of all the eyes in Auburn. I met the crowds who called in answer to invitations and 'congratulated' us with all the *sang froid* I could assume. Business letters soon began to press for my return, and I was face to face with the question whether I should take my wife to Boston and introduce her to my friends. Try as I might, I could not bring myself to this. 'Not now, at least,' I said to myself. 'I will go alone for the first time, and pass through the ordeal of meeting Professor and Mrs. Marlin before I take Anna.' So I told her that I was obliged to make a hasty journey to the

city, and that it was not expedient to take her. Though her face was pale, she acceded without a word, and I went away. But my tale is a long one, is it not? You are becoming weary."

"On the contrary," was the reply, "I am growing intensely interested."

Darrell took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped from his lips the moisture that had gathered there.

"Perhaps when I tell you what I learned when I reached Boston, you will mingle a little pity with the blame which you must feel for my conduct. Shut off as I had been from all news of the day—for I had seen no paper except the one to which I have alluded—a very important event had been hid from me. The first friend I met after leaving the station, said, 'Very sad that about Professor Marlin, wasn't it? You knew him, of course.' I pretended to understand, rather than excite wonder by my ignorance, and going to my office I took down the file of the *Boston Herald* that is always kept there, and searched its columns eagerly. And there it was, burning itself into my eyes, like a frightful dream. The story was to this effect :

"Yesterday evening Professor Solomon Marlin, one of the most famous of our students of the science of political economy, died at the Parke House, under peculiarly distressing circumstances. He had gone to the hotel in company with Miss Laura Casson and Mr. Melville Currane, J. P., for the purpose of having a marriage ceremony performed, both he and the lady holding views which made them object to a religious rite. Mr. Currane informed our reporter that the party partook of a supper in one of the small dining-rooms, and after it was finished, and just as

ne was about to put the necessary questions, the Professor suddenly complained of a pain in the region of the heart, and began to sink rapidly. Miss Casson, though naturally much agitated, did all she could for the stricken man, and Dr. Haskins, who was in the house, came without a moment's delay, but the Professor did not rally, and within a quarter of an hour breathed his last. We learn that the funeral will be entirely private and that the interment will take place Saturday, at Mount Auburn.'"

As he finished the quotation, throughout which his voice trembled perceptibly, Darrell continued :

"Was there ever such a combination? Just as my chance of winning the woman I loved had been made, by an accident, practically certain, I had placed myself through an insane act beyond the possibility of possessing her. Steadying my nerves as well as I was able I went that evening to tender my condolences. She received me with all the customary grace and courtesy, and spoke in chastened tones of her loss. When she had given me in her own words a description of all that occurred at the Parker House, she asked whether my wife was in the city and expressed a hope that I would bring her to see her. Something in her manner convinced me that she was playing a very difficult part, and in my state of mind I could not follow her.

"You will never see my wife, Miss Casson," I cried, impulsively. "You are too wise not to know that I married without giving to her one particle of that perfect love which, less than two months ago, I laid at your feet! The error I have committed brings its own punishment, when I return and learn for the first time that you are still single and that I may never again be in a position to ask you to share

my life. I am tied by the law and I shall not attempt to break the bonds I placed so recklessly upon my own limbs. But one thing I shall do. I shall accept the invitation you gave me the last time I was here to call upon you as freely as ever. For I need, even more than I did then, all the kindness, all the charity, all the friendship you offered me."

Miss Casson listened to me as if surprised.

"Circumstances have changed since I gave you that invitation," she said, mildly.

"The alteration is not so great as it appears," I replied. "We understood, then, that *you* were to be the married one. Now it is *I* who am bound. If I would have been welcome when you were a wife, why shall I not when I am a husband? Your meetings with me would not have made you less true to Professor Marlin. They will not break my fealty to Anna Darrell."

Mordaunt looked searchingly at his companion.

"A most remarkable story," he said. "I do not know what to say to you."

"Say nothing," said Darrell, impetuously. "There is nothing for you to say—nothing that any word of yours would help. Things have gone on at Auburn with no friction. My wife has won my earnest regard and my profound respect. If my long absences have not pleased her, she has at least been wise enough to say nothing to me on the subject. The aunt hates me cordially, but so she would had I been a husband of the most devoted stripe. I have two children, a thing to be regretted, as they only tend to complicate the situation. I hope and pray there will be no more. Anna writes me every week now—she wrote twice a week when I was in America—and I answer most of her letters. She is a good little

woman, and I would not willingly cause her a moment's uneasiness. But there is no brain-sympathy between us. She is a country girl, who has probably never given a thought to the great problems of life, never even heard the names of the authors I most admire. She can do nothing for the intellectual side of me, which Laura Casson fills completely. When I get one of Laura's letters I am elevated and inspired. When I get one of Anna's I am depressed and gloomy, as you found me this morning."

The speaker rose, and the friends walked slowly back in the direction of their hotel.

"It is apparently quite a hopeless case," said Mordaunt.

"Quite," replied the other. "I see no avenue of escape. I should owe everlasting gratitude to the man who would help me to find one."

"How old are the children?"

"Alice, the eldest, is seven. She was born the first year. Ethel is three. They are beauties, like their mother, and inherit also her sweetness of character. Thank goodness, they have no trait of mine!"

"Have you any of their pictures with you?"

"Yes, I have them all in a group. I will show it to you when we get to the hotel. I will bring it in when I come to lunch."

Mordaunt began to have a strange anxiety to gaze upon the photograph of the wife whose peculiar story he had just heard. He was glad when the lunch was ready, but he soon saw that his friend had forgotten his promise, for he neither produced the picture nor alluded to it during the progress of the meal. As they left the dining-room Darrell

remarked that he was going out on business and would probably not return till late in the evening.

Mordaunt went to his own room, took up a novel and tried to read. Before he had scanned a dozen pages a garçon came to the door with a packet that "the other monsieur American" had sent. It was the picture.

The likeness of Mrs. Darrell was a remarkably good one, and Mordaunt was more than surprised at the beauty which it revealed. For a long time he held it, pondering over the sad fate of the deserted wife. Then he was aroused by a cablegram, informing him that his presence was necessary in New York at the earliest possible moment. He picked up a Paris paper, and saw that one of the French steamers would leave Havre the following morning at an early hour.

He looked for some minutes longer at the photograph, wondering how the husband of a wife like that [could treat her and speak of her as Darrell had done. He liked Darrell, but he wished he had never made him the confidant of this experience. It showed a side of his friend's nature that he did not admire.

Leaving a note stating the circumstances which took him away so suddenly, he boarded the evening train for Havre, and the next day was on the sea. Nine days after he was in New York, attending to the business that had brought him home. And a week later he alighted from the train at Auburn and wrote on the register of the hotel his first two names: "Harold Allen."

He had decided to see the original of the photograph and do a little judging for himself.]

CHAPTER V.

MISS CASSON AT HOME.

The house that Miss Laura Casson occupied was situated on Columbus avenue, a thoroughfare that was expected, by its most enthusiastic friends, at the time of which I write, to hold for many years the charm that has since deserted it for the sand-heaps of the more aristocratic Back Bay. In 1870 it was considered a very desirable place indeed, and Miss Casson's residence was in the best part of it, only a few minutes' walk above Berkeley street. She lived alone here with her servants, devoting her time to the various reforms in which she was interested. Her work included the editing of a magazine which advocated the cause of advanced thought, and which she published in partnership with Edmund Darrell. But the pleasantest thing to the public about her house was the fact that the doors were thrown open on two evenings of each week to a very bright party of people, of all shades of belief and opinions, who found it a delightful centre for the interchange of ideas, and the making of interesting acquaintances. Thursdays there was usually a large party present, but it was on Sundays that the crush was the greatest.

Men could be met at these gatherings who had spent their youth in fighting African slavery in the Southern States, with voice and pen; who had labored to supplement it with the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution; and who

were now turning their superfluous energy into the cause of improved taxation, total abstinence, woman suffrage, or some other fad of the hour. Women were there who had advocated almost everything from free divorce to laws compelling their sex to don masculine attire. There were ex-clergymen, whose broadened views had lost them their pulpits. There were men who professed to worship Buddha, and others who could show that all wisdom had come to earth and died long before the birth of the Nazarene. There were also, scattered among these, business men of hard heads and orthodox sentiments, and young people who had no settled views, but came to listen and learn.

Miss Casson asked only one thing of any one who advanced a theory in her parlors—honesty. It mattered not to her how foreign to her own convictions their doctrines were, if they were sincere in presenting them. It was one of her sayings that the absurdity of to-day is the accepted truth of to-morrow.

Doubtless many good Bostonians looked with a sentiment approaching horror upon Miss Casson and her set. But then many good Bostonians have looked with equal horror upon some of the best and noblest men and women who have lived within their borders, and have afterwards builded monuments to them and sounded their praises as freely as once they cursed them.

On one of the June Sundays when Darrell was absent in Paris, let me introduce the reader, by permission of the hostess, to Miss Casson's parlors.

It was yet early and the mistress of ceremonies had not made her appearance, when a small party were ushered into the rooms, and proceeded, in true

Bohemian style, to make themselves at home. There was no constraint on these occasions, and very little formality. The early comers were four in number, and they found seats together, beginning to talk with vivacity, though in very low tones. A habit of devoting a great deal of conversation to one's neighbors obtains, I have found, in "advanced" circles as well as in those of ordinary people, and the members of the quartette in question began at once to discuss their hostess and her expected guests with charming freedom.

"She is really a most remarkable woman," said one of the ladies, a quite young woman named Miss Everest, speaking to one of the gentlemen, who was making his first visit to the house. "It requires positive genius to gather such a set as one meets here, and prevent all clashing. You will see her pour iced tea for Mr. Teetotaller Smith, and ladle out claret punch for Colonel Tomnoddy Brown, with equal grace. She never forgets the oatmeal biscuit and fruit for Vegetarian Jones, nor the glass of hot water for Dyspepsia Robinson. She will listen with the greatest apparent interest to the development of some idea in which I know she has not the slightest faith, and find in the bushel of chaff which has been offered to her some grain of wheat that she can indorse without too much strain on her conscience. She never flatters, never bestows praise where she does not think it deserved, and yet contrives to make each one feel that his coming has given her a personal gratification. Her memory is perfect. She learns the particular idiosyncracies of each of the hundreds who come here, and has the faculty of saying the especial thing that he would most like to hear."

Mr. Rossborough, to whom these remarks were made, looked duly impressed. At this moment a lady and gentleman entered the room, and the others rose to greet them.

"Mrs. St. John, my friend Mr. Rossborough. Mr. Rossborough, Mr. George Clarkson."

There was something in the mention of the latter name that implied that Mr. Rossborough had heard of the gentleman, which was the fact. Miss Everest had taken up a good share of the time on her way to Miss Casson's that evening in talking about this new-comer to the Casson fold, whose utterances had, she said, fascinated the hostess as no one's else had since Darrell went away.

"I wonder if Laura will tell us any news about Mr. Darrell to-night," said Mrs. St. John, as soon as the presentation had taken place. "If she doesn't volunteer something, I shall be tempted to ask her outright. It is two months since he was here, and it is time she revealed the secret."

This statement met with warm approval from Miss Symonds, the third member of the original quartette, and consequently from Mr. Buzzell, the young man who accompanied her. Mrs. St. John was the only one present who was on sufficiently intimate terms with Miss Casson to speak of her as "Laura," which fact gave her an importance which she fully realized.

"How long have you known Mr. Darrell?" asked Miss Everest, who did not have a very high opinion of Mrs. St. John, but was willing to use the advantage of her knowledge for all that.

Mrs. St. John paused to sum up.

"It is fully eight years since I first met him. Laura was living at that time on Mt. Vernon street."

"A long time—is it not—for such an attachment, and have it amount to nothing tangible?" suggested Miss Everest.

Mrs. St. John arched her eyebrows with an air of superior wisdom.

"That is Laura's secret," she said, in a low voice.

"But you know it, of course," said Miss Everest, rather piqued.

"I know a thousand things in this little world of Boston, my dear, that I am not at liberty to repeat."

Mrs. St. John rose to welcome a lady who had just arrived, and to whom she seemed to have something of importance to communicate, and Miss Everest took occasion to express guardedly her doubts as to whether some people knew quite as many secrets as they wished others to infer.

"I have heard a rumor," said Mr. Rossborough, "that Mr. Darrell is married."

"Oh, that's not possible!" cried Miss Symonds. "I am sure Miss Casson would not encourage him so openly if he were."

"I don't see that she 'encourages' him at all," put in Miss Everest. "Keeping a man waiting eight years is hardly what I should call giving him much encouragement."

"I presume he only comes the same as other men who attend her receptions," remarked Mr. Clarkson, who seemed to have developed a sudden interest in the conversation. "It is not necessary, I suppose, that she should promise to marry every man whom she invites here."

"Ah, but it is quite another affair," responded Miss Symonds. "I thought everybody knew that Mr. Darrell was on special terms. The rest of you come on Thursdays and Sundays, at a specified

hour. But there is no hour nor day to which **Edmund** is restricted. He is the most intimate friend **Miss Casson** has in the world—much more intimate than **Mrs. St. John** there, with all her talk about ‘*Dear Laura.*’ ”

She threw a glance not wholly free from spite in the direction of the lady referred to, for which **Miss Everest** mentally thanked her.

“You surprise me,” said **Mr. Rossborough**. “This intimacy, you say, has been going on for years ?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And it causes no talk ?”

Miss Symonds surveyed her questioner with a look of the blankest amazement.

“Talk !” she exclaimed, theatrically. “*Talk !* Of **Laura Casson !**”

Mr. Rossborough was crushed. **Mr. Clarkson** drew a deep breath of relief and left the group. A number of new arrivals turned the conversation, and before they had finished their mutual greetings, **Miss Casson** herself entered the room.

There are people whom it is difficult to describe with pen and paper, and **Laura Casson** was certainly one of them. It is easy to say that she was a little under the medium height, of slender build, neither dark nor fair, and twenty-eight years of age ; but so were a thousand other women in **Boston** that night. She had no especial oddity in dress or speech. Her garments were plain almost to excess, she wore no jewelry whatever, and her manners were most unassuming. The only thing that distinguished her especially was the extreme slenderness and whiteness of her hands, which were almost transparent. They had a highly nervous quality that might have

delighted one skilled in the science of palmistry ; and even to the ordinary observer they indicated a highly sensitive organism, with perhaps a delicacy of constitution.

Why Laura Casson easily dominated any assembly of which she became a part, nobody could tell. That she did it nobody pretended to deny. One by one she took her guests by the hand and said her simple words of welcome. Mrs. St. John took up a position at her side and introduced those who attended the reception for the first time. With a question or two and a smile, she won the heart of each visitor before she turned to the next. When she had greeted every one, she sought out Mr. George Clarkson, and they had a quiet talk together, which no one else was privileged to hear.

"I have been wondering why it is that you interest me so much," she said to him, after awhile, "and I have discovered it at last. Your manner of stating things reminds me of a friend who is now on his travels—Mr. Edmund Darrell."

"But *I* am not a married man," responded Clarkson, instantly.

It was rude ; undoubtedly it was rude. But politeness was not a virtue that he placed above all others, and he wanted to know, then and there, whether the suspicion of Mr. Rossborough was true. He had never seen Darrell in his life. He had known Miss Casson but a month. But it seemed to him that all worth having in this world and the far beyond pivoted on the answer to that question.

Miss Casson gave no evidence of having heard his words. A lady who had just entered the room smiled at her, and she excused herself, with charming sweetness, to cross the carpet. Clarkson raged

inwardly as he saw how easily she had foiled him, and rose impatiently to meet Mrs. St. John, who was coming to see him.

"You like Miss Casson, don't you?" she said.

"Very much," he replied. But in saying this he prevaricated. At that moment he almost hated her, and to save his life he could not have given a reason.

"I knew you would like her when I brought you here," continued the self-satisfied lady. "She likes you, too. It is not often, I assure you, that Laura sits down alone with any gentleman, as she did with you."

"Except Edmund Darrell," he said, sulkily.

"Oh, well, that is a different thing," said Mrs. St. John. "They own a magazine together, and—and there are various reasons why she treats him differently from the rest. But Laura likes you, and I know it. She asked me yesterday if you were certain to be here to-night."

The sulky fit was on him and he tore himself from the voluble woman as soon as he could do so. He did not like to hear her speak of "Laura," when he must confine himself to the more formal term. Two gentlemen were discussing the subject of cremation, and were waxing rather warm over it.

"I tell you it would be a blow at our most tender feelings," said one. "To burn the bodies of our dead friends seems to me rank barbarism. Our well-kept cemeteries are nurseries of religious and humanitarian sentiments."

"What do you say, Mr. Clarkson?" asked the other gentleman. "Do you see anything lovely in a charnel-house?"

"Do you not admire the beauties of such places

as Mt. Auburn and Forest Hills?" put in the first speaker. "That is the question."

"I do not," replied Clarkson. "I have never seen a cemetery that I admired. They are all too full of little graves."

Miss Casson brought the friend who had last arrived where she could hear the disputants. "Did I not tell you he was very bright?" she whispered.

"How could incineration prevent the great mortality among children?" inquired the gentleman.

"It would not prevent it. But the little tombstones would not rise up against us as we pass."

The gentleman declared that this was a mere begging of the question. But somehow the new thought seemed to have supplanted the old one, and a silence fell upon the party.

"How do you like her?" asked Miss Everest of Clarkson, when she got a chance, soon after, to speak to him alone.

"Who? Mrs. St. John? Oh, she is very agreeable."

"Now that is unkind," responded the young lady, "when you remember that she first suggested to you to come here, as she is telling everybody she did."

He was leaning with one arm on a mantel, and half the eyes in the room were on him, with one expression and another.

"Do you think I owe her anything for that?" he asked, without changing countenance.

"Then you are not pleased to be here?"

"No."

It was a very abrupt negative indeed, and Miss Everest's face wore a tinge of regret. Luckily her

position was such that no one could see that but him.

"I am very sorry," she said, earnestly, "for now you will never come again."

"Oh, yes, I shall."

She glanced up in surprise.

"And you don't like Miss Casson?"

He smiled. The lady of whom they were speaking was regarding him at the moment from a distant corner where she was pretending interest in the scheme of an elderly gentleman to deport all the Southern freedmen to Africa. He thought it necessary to smile at Miss Everest, and he did so.

"Do not catechise me too much to-night," he said, as an accompaniment to the smile. "Remember, you have never showed me that balcony you told me of, and the garden hung with Chinese lanterns."

She led the way gladly through a little hall. The bit of land in the rear, in which a few trees and bushes had been induced to grow, had been made quite attractive by the shiny colored paper among the branches. It was marvellous how so good an effect could be produced by such a simple process.

In two minutes he proposed returning to the parlors. Miss Everest, who liked the cooler air of the balcony, and was not averse, either, to having him to herself for a little while, complied with reluctance. They arrived just in time to hear a gentleman named Jannin assailing what he called the insane doctrine of abolishing private ownership in land.

"When it comes to social equality I am about as advanced as any one," he was saying. "I favor universal suffrage, women and all, and the abolition of the poll tax. I think the government ought to own the telegraph, the railroads, and perhaps even-

tually the mines. But of all the absurd things ever preached, this talk about sequestering the soil from individuals is the worst. Why, the desire to possess a piece of real estate is one of the most progressive signs that a man can show. The one who has secured a house and lot is a better citizen than the one who is content to pay rent all his life. Such a man becomes a conservator of morals. He stands for law and order, as no rent-payer can ever do. Is there any one here who will take issue with me on that?" he asked pompously.

"Yes," said Clarkson, "*I* will."

Mrs. St. John was standing next to Miss Casson.

"I think he would take issue with anybody or anything," she whispered ; but Laura did not seem to hear her.

Mr. Jannin eyed Clarkson uneasily. He had not expected that answer to his challenge.

"In what way do you differ with me, sir?" he inquired, loftily.

"I differ with what you imply, as much as with what you assert. I do not believe, for instance, that law and order are always on the side of right and justice."

"Indeed ! And who is to decide?" asked Mr. Jannin, more loftily than before.

"The people. By mere force of numbers they will say before long whether certain men shall pretend to own this earth or not."

"Why do you say 'pretend ?'" asked Mr. Jannin. "If I have bought a piece of land and paid for it, is it not mine?"

"That depends on whether there is a man, woman or child in the world whose need of it is greater than yours. You own, perhaps, a plank that lies on

the shore of a river. If I see a man drowning in the stream I will take the plank and throw it to him, whether you are willing or not. Some day they will take your land and give it to a starving man who wants to raise potatoes. How much land do you think you have a right to own?"

"All I can legally get."

"A thousand acres, perhaps?"

"Yes, a million."

"Or the whole of the earth's surface?"

Mr. Jannin was a trifle disturbed by this question, but he resolved to be consistent to the last.

"If such a thing were conceivable," he replied, "I should have a right to all the land I could purchase, even if it included every acre in the world."

Clarkson was happy at last. He loved controversy, and he made his moves like a chess player.

"It is quite conceivable," he said. "We live in a country where millions of acres are already the property of corporations. These acres may easily drift into the control of a few men, and at last into single ownership. I do not hesitate to say that at the present rate half of all the land in America might be owned by a hundred individuals in 1925. It is quite possible that the time might come under our present laws when one man would own every hill, valley and plain on this planet. And you say, if he or his ancestors had bought it and paid for it, he ought to have it."

Mr. Jannin uttered a dogged affirmative.

"And this ownership of his," continued Clarkson, making another move on his chess-board, "would of course include the right of deciding what tenants, if any, he would have upon his land; and the right to summon the constituted officials to evict all who

refused to leave when notified, even to the last soul."

"That's a fantastic conception, I must say!" exclaimed Mr. Jannin.

"But, under the conditions imagined, quite a correct one, is it not?"

Mr. Jannin did not reply.

"Do you not see," said Clarkson, impressively, "that some future landlord might become the arbiter of life and death to millions of people, by taking from them the soil through which nature meant that they should derive their sustenance? Even in this century there have been famines in Europe that might have been averted, or at least much mitigated, if the plows had been permitted to turn the sods of my lord's lawns and hunting preserves. There the sacredness of property has ever been held above the sacredness of life, if the life was that of a laborer. With all our boasted freedom in America we are drifting into the state of things that we have so freely denounced in our cousins over the water."

Mr. Jannin rallied.

"You are trying to confuse us," said he, "by imaginative conceits. Let me put the question in an easier way. Take the case of a man who has worked ten or fifteen years to pay for a little house-lot and garden, denying himself and his family many comforts in order to accomplish that object. Would you take away his land and give it to the general government, when it had become the staff of his old age? And if you would not take one piece of land, what right have you to take another?"

There was an expression of triumph in Mr. Jannin's face as he propounded this query, which he

had no doubt was a poser. Miss Casson looked earnestly at Clarkson, and though he had not once turned his eyes in her direction he knew he had her sympathy.

"I will answer 'No,' in one word to your question about the old man," said he. "My theory pre-supposes the right of your hypothetical laborer to live on that lot and cultivate it, as long as it did not exceed the measure of his needs. But what an outrage it is that he should have been put to such sacrifices to get that little spot to rest on. He had as much natural right to it as he had to the air he breathed or the water he drank. To get what Nature made for him he has had to do double his share of the world's drudgery, and miss half the comforts and pleasures of existence. And why? Merely that some other man should live at ease, some other family rest while his toiled for them. The injustice of law had taken away his part of the soil, and he had to ransom it with excess of labor. There is nothing more ridiculous than for individuals to go about pretending that certain parts of the earth's surface are their exclusive property, and not only theirs, but that of their heirs forever. Our descendants will find vast amusement in examining, in some museum of the future, a book of titles of the Nineteenth Century. They will wonder what sort of men used to undertake to deed to each other parcels of land with such and such boundaries. When they find a deed professing to cover soil enough for the maintenance of a hundred or a thousand people, as many of them do to-day, their hilarity will be uncontrollable. For it will seem to them as ridiculous to have sold exclusive rights in the earth, as it would in the atmosphere or the sunlight."

Mr. Jannin fell back upon a common retort.

"You will never live to see that day."

"But it is coming for all that," replied Clarkson, confidently.

At this point the lunch was served. Miss Casson, thinking that the debate was likely to reach too warm a plane, had whispered the directions to her maid. The sideboard, which stood in a little recess, from which the curtains were now drawn, contained an assortment of wines and liquors, while the table adjacent had tea, coffee and chocolate, both hot and iced. Miss Casson had helped Clarkson with her own hands to some of the more solid refreshments.

"You take brandy, I believe," she said.

"Sometimes," he replied. "And sometimes I take champagne; and sometimes beer. To-night, sherry, if you please."

She handed him the decanter and glass, and as he poured out the wine, she said:

"That really requires an explanation."

"Oh, it depends on how I feel," said he, lightly. "If I have special need of mental strength I drink brandy. But to-night I knew that you were listening to every word I uttered, and my powers wanted no greater stimulus. When I only wish to talk of commonplace things I drink beer: but this is not the presence of the commonplace. When I am with a woman I love"—he spoke slowly and distinctly, but very low indeed—"I want champagne, because it is love's drink. To-night I drink sherry, which means—nothing."

She heard, she understood, but she gave no sign.

"Never the still lighter drinks?" she asked, to keep him talking.

"Yes, I take coffee when I awake in the morning and after dinner; chocolate when I visit, once a year, an old aunt, who offers me nothing else; and tea invariably when I am the guest of a lady who intends to always lead a single life."

A gentleman who was eating an ice near by spoke to Miss Casson, who turned for a moment to reply. She also saw that Mrs. St John was helping those of the guests who were not yet sufficiently at home to help themselves.

"Tell me one thing, if you can," said Clarkson, when he had her attention again. "Why is it that bright women who are single always prefer the company of married men?"

She looked the picture of unconsciousness, and shook her head thoughtfully.

"I am not good at riddles. You will have to tell me."

"And you don't know, really?"

"No. I never could guess conundrums. But there is Miss Everest getting ready to leave, and I suppose she will not thank me for keeping you."

He bit his lips in suppressed anger.

"She came with Mr. Rossborough," he said.

"So she did. How stupid of me. It was Mrs. St. John, of course. By-the-way, I liked what you said to Mr. Jannin. I wish Mr. Darrell could know you. You have many ideas in common."

"When will he return?" he asked, darkly.

"Not before September, I fear."

"It must be lonesome for you."

A clear impertinence this, but she did not seem to mind it.

"I am too busy to be lonesome," she replied. "My magazine takes up a great deal of my time. I

wish," she added, "that you would write something for it."

"Perhaps I will," he answered. "And shall I bring it here and read it to you when it is ready?"

"I am only at home Thursday and Sunday evenings, you see, and there is always a crowd. It would be better, I think, to mail it."

More people were beginning to leave, and she had to divert her attention from him for a little while. He wished he could control his impetuosity better, as he compared it to her self-possession. Mrs. St. John was waiting for him, and it was necessary to accompany her home. When there was a place made in the group that surrounded Miss Casson, he put out his hand like the rest.

"Must you go?" she said. "It is early yet. I hope I shall see you often. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. St. John."

It is marvellous with what ease a clever woman can exhibit regret at your departure, express the wish that you would prolong your stay, and dismiss you irrevocably—all in one sentence. Clarkson noticed Miss Casson's facility in this direction, and decided that she was wholly heartless.

But if she were, why did she go to her bed-room, after the last guest had left, and throw herself in a passionate paroxysm on her pillow?

Why did she arise, after a long time had passed, and sit by her window with her white and nervous hands clasped so tightly together, and her eyes fixed, hot and staring, on vacancy?

Why, if she were wholly heartless?

CHAPTER VI.

"MAY WE PRAY FOR YOU?"

Harold Mordaunt was the son of a man of wealth. He was also the grandson of a man of wealth, and the nephew of a woman of wealth, all of whom had remembered him liberally in their testaments. This being the case, he saw no reason why he should devote his life to increasing his money, especially when the beneficent laws of the land had arranged all that matter for him with no trouble whatever on his part. After leaving college he studied medicine, but practiced only in hospitals. Upon receiving his degree in a German university he took to travel as a pleasant mode of spending his time. He became perfectly familiar with the principal cities of Europe and his own country, and even penetrated into the more civilized parts of Africa and Asia. He was not the sort of man who finds his amusement in spearing boats or hunting tigers. An interesting book and a hammock suited him better than a wild chase across country with an enraged elephant in pursuit. He preferred a box at the opera to a climb over mountains, and a chat with an entertaining woman to reeling up a line with any other description of game-fish at the opposite end.

He was strongly built and athletic, for all that, and rather handsome, in a way. All women called him so, at least, and they are the better judges. In dress he was mindful of effects, though by no means

a fop. Few men can afford to assume superiority to clothes, and he never attempted it.

Though he had known women of many lands, he had never thought it necessary to fall in love with any of them. If he had more than once threaded the mazes of a mild flirtation, he had never seen a girl who "frighted sleep" from his eyelids. He liked bright women, and he liked good oysters, but he would almost as soon have thought seriously of proposing marriage to one as to the other.

"Life is a game that should be played for all it is worth," said a friend to him once, while urging him to take a marital partner.

"I think I will have to call the game a draw," he had replied, with a laugh.

It was Henry Ward Beecher who said, "If you have only a dollar to spend, spend it like a king." Mordaunt had many dollars to spend, and he spent them quite royally on occasion, though his tastes were not of the most expensive kind. He was quite generous with the money he had never earned, and had much rather subscribe to a charity or hand a street-beggar a piece of money than investigate the merits of the application. Blessed with health that never failed him and with spirits that seldom fell, he could not understand why so many people found life a burden. "If I had been born into the lower strata," he used to say to himself, "I would struggle with my unlucky stars till I got out of it, as no doubt some ancestor of mine did for me. As there is no need of exertion I should be a dunce to enter the turmoil."

Why had he taken this trip to Auburn? It was as unlike him as anything that could be conceived. Certainly he had no idea of making trouble in the

family of his oldest friend. There was a good deal of honor and chivalry in all his dealings with those whom he considered his social equals. But idleness is responsible for many strange actions.

"What do you consider the most desirable thing in life?" Edmund Darrell had asked him, when they were having one of their discussions in Paris.

"A new sensation," had been the unhesitating reply.

Mordaunt needed a new sensation. Agreeable as is elegant leisure in itself, the man who has Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins can hardly help being *ennuied* after a while. The *dolce far niente* that contents the Italian will weary the American in time. Mordaunt realized that there was something very peculiar in the experience of his friend Darrell. He pronounced it positively unique in the list of marital incompatibilities he had heard or read of. He could not imagine a more interesting study than was to be afforded by making the acquaintance of the two women who swayed that hard-headed Communist, so difficult to influence in everything else. The face of the wife presented, in the picture of her that he had seen, the paradox of being contented with her lot, and yet of being just the sort of woman who would not be at all pleased with the state of affairs that the husband had detailed. He had always had a theory that a woman ought to be able to hold her husband's love by the sheer force of her wifeness; in other words that, if she lost him, it must be, in some measure, her own fault. And so the wife he had seen in that picture seemed to this man of leisure worth a few weeks of study.

He was not fond of doing things in an under-handed way, either; but there seemed no open way

to do this particular thing. He could not say to Darrell, "I am going to Auburn to see your wife, and afterwards to Boston to compare Miss Casson with her, and discover, if I can, what it is that attracts you to the one and causes you to neglect the other."

It was a case where secrecy was a prime necessity.

Mordaunt knew that all he would have to say, when his surreptitious visits were discovered was this: "It was all 'in your interest, my dear boy. Things were in a deuced muddle, you know, and I thought I might manage to help straighten them out." Edmund might demur a little at first, but in any case there could be no serious outcome. The two men were too good friends for that.

Landlord Upham of the Auburn House took a great fancy to Mordaunt, or "Mr. Allen," as he called himself, and before his guest had been there three days he was beguiled into no end of gossip concerning the Darrell family.

"That's a mighty curi's case," he said, "an' I don't s'pose anybody in the village jest rightly understands it. She was the purtiest girl in Auburn, an' she's a good way yet from bein' homely. They've got two of the nicest children I ever see. He pervides lib'rally, but he ain't never taken his wife out of town once, an' it's so seldom he comes here that some of the new res'dents ain't never seen him. It was jest four times last year that he dropped into the town at all, an' then only from one train to another, as one might call it. People uster ask Anna—we all call her Anna—about it at first, but all she would say was 'that his business was drivin'."

"Mrs. Darrell has an aunt here, has she not?" asked Allen.

"Yes, an' an uncle, too, for that matter, though nobody ever pays any attention to *him*. Old Miss Burton is a keen 'un, I tell you. For months after Anna was married she wouldn't go near her at all, an' I've jest heard there's ben another fallin' out. Lawyer Arnold's ben down there, an' everybody says she's had a new will made disinheritin' Anna. They're both well fixed—Miss Burton an' Ephraim—but Miss Burton can't git over the marriage. It *didn't* suit her, an' it *don't* suit her, an' I'm afeared Anna's goin' to lose a nice fortin'; nigh onter two hundred thousand, folks say."

Mordaunt looked highly interested.

"Perhaps the aunt is at the bottom of the trouble between Darrell and his wife," he suggested.

"No, 'tain't that," replied the landlord. "The fact is, there don't seem to *be* no trouble between 'em. Before he'd ben married a fortnight, he went off an' stayed a month. They boarded right here in my house. Most everybody thought they was goin' to break up, then an' there. But the day he come back she run down the stairs to meet 'im, an' they was as lovin' as two kittens. Then off he went ag'in, an' the next time he come it was three months I guess. He bought her the house she lives in now, though, that time—paid more'n three thousand dollars out fixin' it up, too. The neighbors say she seems awful glad to see him when he does come, an' nobody understands what makes him stay away so much."

On learning that his guest would like to meet Mrs. Darrell, the landlord said nothing would be easier.

"We don't go much on introducin' here in Auburn," said he, "an' Anna ain't no more stuck up

than she ever was. You jest open her gate, knock at the door, an' say I sent you, an' you'll be welcome."

This apparently easy plan did not, however, on the whole, commend itself to Mordaunt's judgment. An opportunity that had more in its favor came on the succeeding Sunday, when Mrs. Upham pointed Anna out to him, as he sat with her and her husband, in their pew in the First Congregational Church.

Mr. Upham was not, by any means, a religious man, but Auburn was a very moral place, and he considered it policy to hire a pew in the principal church, and occasionally, at least, occupy it. If Jim Brodie, his chief stableman, was engaged during the same hour in "hitching up rigs" for the more godless of the population, or if his chief clerk filled on the sly a few bottles and jugs from a hidden store in the cellar, Mr. Upham's presence at divine worship proved that he, at least, had no part in the sinful proceedings. A former owner of the same hotel who had been free to express his contempt for things sacred, frequently languished in durance for violations of the liquor laws. It was observed of Mr. Upham that he "knew how to use judgment," and even the most ardent of the temperance men admitted that it was a good thing to know where a little of the "ardent" could be got in a hurry, "in case of sickness." Once a minister's life had been saved by a dose of the landlord's brandy, "bottled for private use," and soon after that the same malady attacked a large part of the congregation, happily, however—thanks to the brandy—without fatal result.

Anna Darrell sat where Mordaunt could see her

profile without changing his attitude. He looked at her a good deal, remarking how much handsomer she was than her photograph, which could not reproduce the lovely whites and reds of her perfect complexion. What the sermon was about he had not the least idea. She seemed a devout listener to the words of the clergyman, but Mordaunt could not help wondering if her thoughts were not far away across the sea. That that woman, in her youth and beauty, could be content with the life she led, did not seem to him reasonable from any point of view.

When the benediction was pronounced, he asked Mrs. Upham to give him an introduction to Mrs. Darrell, and at the church door the presentation took place in the off-hand country fashion. The plan of introducing gentlemen to ladies only on request of the latter does not prevail in Auburn.

The ceremony, insignificant in itself, was quite enough, according to local usage, to justify Mordaunt in raising his hat and saying "Good-evening," as he passed Mrs. Darrell's residence, "quite by accident," toward sunset that same day. She was sitting alone under the trees inside her grounds, reading—or pretending to read—a newspaper. Now or never, he thought. When she had returned his salutation, he said :

"You have a pleasant home here, Mrs. Darrell."

"Yes, it is called so."

He decided at once that she was pensive, and he wanted more than ever to know all about her.

"All of Auburn seems very pretty," he went on. "In fact, I quite envy the people who have permanent homes here."

It was not wholly a new idea. She had heard summer boarders at the hotel say much the same thing

"Won't you come in?" she asked, rising and approaching the gate.

In Arcadian Auburn this was the eminently proper thing to do for a stranger who had been met informally for the first time five hours before.

Mordaunt thanked her, made some remark about the inviting coolness of the shade trees, and took a seat on one of the benches.

"Yes," he continued, "the situation of this village is truly delightful. The lake, river and hill scenery is perfectly charming. I can hardly recall a prettier spot."

"And you have, perhaps, travelled a great deal?" she said, drawing a natural inference.

"Yes, considerable."

"Across the sea?"

Her thoughts were, then, where he had guessed, when he saw her eyes fixed on the minister. She was certainly pensive.

He answered that he had been across the sea several times and was acquainted with many countries.

"You have seen Paris, of course."

There was so much more to him in this question than appeared on the surface that it disconcerted him for a moment. A strange idea came into his head. He wished that he could take Edmund Darrell by the collar and ask him what he meant by his neglect of this lovely creature, carried on for years without regret or shame. Then he noticed that she was waiting for his answer.

"I know Paris from one end to the other. It is a most beautiful city. I wish you could see it."

"It is prettier than Auburn, is it not?"

He realized that the question was satirical, but he pretended not to notice.

"It is quite different, you know. Paris has two million people. It is more like Boston, or New York, and yet much finer than either. I have a book at the hotel, with many elegant views of Paris and long descriptions of the sights, which I shall be glad to bring you, if you wish."

She thanked him quietly, and he ventured to ask what especially interested her in Paris.

"My husband is there," she answered; but he could make nothing of the words beyond their ordinary significance.

"Indeed! Has he been long away?" asked the dissembler, with a facility that astonished even himself.

"He left home three months ago. He stayed a few weeks in London, and the rest of the time he has been in Paris."

"And does he intend to stay much longer?"

"I do not know."

The new sensation that Mordaunt wanted was coming to him with a vengeance. Never had he felt as he did when he heard this wife speak of her husband as if he were a mere acquaintance, of whose movements she could not be expected to have accurate information. He listened in vain for any trace of bitterness, and his wonder grew with every word she uttered.

"It is strange to me that you should not have wanted to go with him," he said, guardedly. "Most women regard a trip to Paris—a first trip—as the event of a lifetime. But," he added, before she could speak, "I forgot. You have young children, I believe?"

She assented, and gave him their ages.

"Then you could easily have taken them," per-

sued the relentless man. "I have crossed in steamers where there were twenty or thirty children. They are as happy playing about the decks and cabins as any of the older people. Let me urge you not to neglect such a chance again."

She received this in silence, and he began to conceive a great respect for her. It was more than loyal—this clever concealment of her thoughts—it was artistic.

"Ah, Paris is indeed lovely!" he cried, throwing back his head as if in reverie. "The streets are so long and broad; the public squares are filled with such fountains, statues and beds of bright flowers; the parks are so superb! The river, winding almost all around the city, is walled with white stone and crossed by many bridges, under which the pleasure boats dart like swallows. At night innumerable lamps illumine the boulevards, where thousands of men and women sit out of doors at little tables, eating, drinking and chatting, while the musicians play inside the cafés. Life in Paris is one perpetual holiday. I do not wonder that your husband finds it hard to leave there."

Anna Darrell was much too guileless to suspect the deceit of which she was the victim. She was not satisfied—she never had been since that day when her aunt had poisoned her ears with her insinuations—that Edmund was all he should be. But she certainly had no intention of communicating her fears to this stranger. So she answered him that her husband was an inventor who had gone abroad on business solely, and would undoubtedly return as soon as it was finished.

"Many a man has gone to Paris with that intention and failed to carry it out," smiled Mordaunt.

"The gayety of the city affects one until he cannot bear to awake from the delightful dream. Take my advice, Mrs. Darrell, and see it next time for yourself. When you have done so you will be less likely to criticise other poor mortals for their infatuation."

Thinking that it would not be wise to make too long a stay the first time, he remarked that the evening was going to be lovely, and rose to go. The usual civil request "not to be in a hurry" was given and met, and then she parted from him with the same dignity and courtesy with which she had bade him welcome.

"The case grows queerer," mused the young man to himself, as he strolled along a footpath that led into the adjacent woods. "One would think that woman just the kind that a fellow like Darrell would want for a wife—provided he wanted one at all, which I could never see the object of. He said something about needing a 'brain companion.' Now, that's nonsense. A man whose brains are in a constant state of excitement, needs a quiet, sweet-tempered little woman like that one, who will give him an occasional chance to recuperate, instead of always 'talking shop' when he needs a rest. She's pretty—almost handsome—to begin with. She's not up in the ways of fashion, of course—how the deuce should she be when she was never outside the county in her life? She's not well-read, though by this time that has become more his fault than hers. I'll be bound that cross old aunt never saw the use of offering her a book. She's naturally bright, and would respond to cultivation, unless I am awfully mistaken. If I can get on sufficiently brotherly terms I'll talk literature to her, and see what she

says. I wonder how much she does know, anyway."

The next morning a letter came to him from Darrell, forwarded from his permanent address in New York, expressing regret at the circumstance that had compelled him to leave Europe so suddenly, and declaring that Paris lost half its charm without him. There was something else in the letter, also, that was of greater interest to the recipient. Darrell had decided, he wrote, to go to Germany and attend to his business there in person, instead of leaving it to his solicitors, as he had purposed. He feared this would keep him abroad for several months longer, but it seemed the advisable thing to do. The letter ended with these words :

"I have taken the liberty of sending your address to Miss Laura Casson, the Boston lady of whom I spoke to you, with the information that you are likely to be in that city at some time, and that she should send you a card of invitation to her soirées. I have frankly told her that you are a man whom nobody need hope to convert into a progressivist, but that you are, after all, a very good fellow, and I would like to have her meet you. Of course you are under no obligations to accept—if you get the card—and not obliged to like her or the crowd you will meet there. But I would go, if I were you."

Mordaunt was well pleased with this paragraph. He was in no hurry to have Darrell return to America, and an invitation direct to Miss Casson's would spare him the trouble of hunting for one in a roundabout way, as he had intended to do.

"A double stroke of luck!" he said to himself, as he finished reading the epistle. "And yet, what the dickens is the whole thing to me anyway?"

He whiled away the day at a billiard table, with a drummer who was waiting over to see a customer, and when it was nearly dark he took the book about Paris under his arm and sauntered down to Mrs. Darrell's house. A servant showed him into the parlor, and in a few minutes Anna entered and greeted him cordially. He exhibited the book, as his excuse for calling, and when the lamps were lit he turned some of the pages for her and talked about the illustrations. She told him the name of her husband's hotel—as if he didn't know!—and he found several pictures of scenes in the vicinity, with which she was greatly interested.

"In five minutes he could walk to the Avenue de l'Opera, that you see here," he explained. "He can look from his window on the Colonne Vendome, built to commemorate the victories of Napoleon I. If he wants a little stroll before breakfast it will not be too much to walk around the Louvre, and return by the gardens of the Tuilleries."

Thus he went on, turning the leaves and making his comments, in the easy way he knew so well, and he found her much more deeply interested in it all than he had expected. She interpolated very few questions, but she made a delightful listener, and was evidently grateful to him for the pains he had taken.

While they were thus engaged, a nurse called Mrs. Darrell away for a few moments, and when she returned she told him that she had been to kiss her children good-night. Upon which he begged her, if it was not too late, to allow them to come in for a minute.

Alice, the elder, was dark—not too dark—like her mother, while Ethel was very fair. They were

pretty children and they went to the stranger without constraint. They had never been taught the art of shyness.

"And you go to school, I suppose," he said to Alice, after distributing at random a few mild compliments.

"No, sir, not yet," she answered. "But mamma has taught me to read, and Lucy, my nurse, tells me a good many things about the earth and the sky. I shall go to school next year, I think."

The mother met the inquiring eyes with an affirmative smile.

"I have been showing your mamma a book of pictures of the city where your papa is staying," said Mordaunt, unable to repress his anxiety to hear what the child had to say on the all-important subject that weighed on his mind. "I hope she will let you see it to-morrow."

Alice's eyes dilated and her face grew radiant.

"Oh, shall I see the very house he is in?" she cried, clapping her hands. "Please, mamma, show me just that one picture to-night!"

As no objection was raised, Mordaunt took the book and opened it.

"I cannot show you the very hotel he lives in," said he, as Alice leaned over his shoulder in feverish expectation. "But if you were on this avenue that you see here,"—pointing to the Opera—"and were to turn that corner and walk a very little way, you would be in front of the building. It is very pleasant, as I have been saying to your mamma. I have been there and—"

The child could not restrain herself.

"You have been there! Then you must have seen him!" she exclaimed.

She was fairly trembling with excitement. Both her little hands were on his arm and her eyes were gazing into his.

"Mr. Allen did not say he had been there this summer, my darling," corrected the mother. "Your papa has been there but two months, you must remember."

The child was disappointed. A great lump came into her throat as she realized the error she had made. Mordaunt was relieved at his happy extrication from what promised to be a dilemma.

"You miss your papa very much," he said, kindly.

"Oh, so much !" she replied. "But we think he will come back very soon now."

Then Darrell's family had not been apprized of his change of plan ! He had taken pains to write about it to an outsider, and let his wife and children wait. Mordaunt was sure he could have choked him had he had him there. Then he spoke to the smaller one :

"How is it with you, my little Ethel ; do you miss papa, too ?"

"No, me doesn't," was the unconcerned reply.

"She is so little, sir," said Alice, apologetically, before her mother could speak. "She is only three. Children do not remember very well at three, do they, sir ?"

Mordaunt stroked the heads of both of them, and began to think that he could make one of a party to adjust a rope around the neck of such a father as they had. Then he bade the little ones good-night, telling them to sleep well and be good children. At the door Alice paused and spoke to him again :

"We pray to God every night," she said rever-

ently, "to bless papa and mamma. Would you care very much if we prayed for you, too?"

The question staggered him as he had never been staggered in his life.

"I should be glad to have you," he answered, but his utterance was thick and he felt stifled.

When Anna returned from the visit she paid to the little ones, who must have their mother's kiss as the very last thing before falling asleep, she found him standing.

"Are you going so early?" she asked in a slightly disappointed tone, for she liked this man already, and knew that the evening would be lonesome when he had gone.

"I only came to-night to bring the book," he said. "I did not intend to remain long. But I will come again, if I may."

"I hope you will," she responded, cordially. "You are always welcome."

He walked in the silence of the woods that night until it was very late. How could a child's words—the thoughtless utterances of a little one of seven—affect a grown man so? A man, too, who had never troubled himself about prayer, and who had not always led the best life he knew.

"Would you care, sir, if we prayed for you?"

He heard it over and over, and he was pleased to remember his reply: "I should be very glad to have you."

There had been nothing designedly wrong in Harold Mordaunt's mind that evening, before Alice spoke those words. But if there was the slightest possibility of harm to that household in the depths of his heart, the childish voice had made an end of it forever!

Such a wife and such children—and such a husband! What blindness could have so affected Edmund!

And then Mordaunt remembered that he had not yet seen Laura Casson.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN LOVE HAS FLED.

It has probably been the experience of most men who have sat upon juries, either in or out of court, that they have found themselves coming to a decision on the merits of a case some time before the first side had finished its evidence. Mordaunt had declared in favor of the fair witness who had been the only one yet in the box, before it occurred to him that there was yet another to be heard.

After a third call at the Darrell house he decided to absent himself from Auburn for a few days. He wanted to see Miss Casson, whose invitation came promptly to hand, and he also thought it best not to allow the Auburn gossips to note that he was too constant a visitor at the home of the deserted wife. Arriving at Boston he went to Young's Hotel, which was in those days the especial and popular place for the housing of single gentlemen, and, as he had no business of greater importance, he visited Miss Casson's parlors that same evening, which happened to be a Thursday.

There were thirty or forty other persons there when his name was announced, but for a few minutes

he had eyes for her alone. He was conscious of a disappointment when the slight, delicate woman came forward to greet him. He had imagined her a sort of Hebe, whose physical charms would far outshine the modest creature he had just left in Auburn. When a man preferred the society of another woman to that of his wife, thought this ignorant young gentleman, the cause must be one to impress itself instantly upon the beholder. Laura Casson had few of the claims to beauty that he had noted in Anna Darrell. She had neither her height nor her complexion, nor her brilliancy of eyes, nor her roundness of outline, nor her erectness of carriage. She was to his mind quite insignificant in contrast to the woman with whom he must always compare her.

These were the first impressions. Perhaps the others would come later on.

An unusual nervousness for those white hands of hers—almost a trembling—seized them as they touched his fingers, and realizing it she gave him a clasp that was quite cold. After a few commonplaces, she said, in a whisper, "Do not mention Mr. Darrell's name here. I will explain why, later." Then she introduced him to a group of which Mr. Clarkson was the most conspicuous figure, and turned to greet some guests who had just arrived.

"You are a Bostonian, of course," said Mordaunt to Clarkson, by way of beginning a conversation.

"I am a citizen of the world," was the reply. "I place no country nor people above another."

"Ah," said the other. "You are evidently, like myself, a traveller."

"Not as much as I mean to be. I have only spent a few months in Southern Europe and a year in Germany. I shall go again before long."

"Perhaps we shall meet there," said Mordaunt, "as I expect to winter in Italy. Which of the countries of Europe do you prefer among those which you have seen?"

"France," came the quick reply.

"And why France?"

"Because it is the ripest for revolution."

"Whew!" thought Mordaunt. "Another Communist, full of his subject." But for Miss Casson's injunction, the name of Darrell would have been immediately on his tongue.

Others were listening, among the number Mr. Jannin, Mr. Rossborough, Miss Everest and Miss Symonds.

"It seems to me," said Mordaunt, "that France is particularly well governed just now. She has had many years of peace, and her progress in the sciences, the arts, and in manufactures has been stupendous. How could it benefit her people to have a republic?"

This question loosened Clarkson's tongue, and for the next ten minutes his reply, delivered in the most rapid and impassioned manner, drew nearly all of those present to his end of the room.

When he paused, Mordaunt turned to Miss Casson, who had approached with the others, and inquired whether a discussion of this kind was perfectly agreeable to her. Being a stranger, he said he did not wish to transgress any of the rules, but he would like to ventilate his ideas on the subject in question a little further.

"Say all you please," she answered, smiling. "That is just what we are here for."

At that Mordaunt proceeded to reply *seriatim* to what he had just heard.

"While a republic may be theoretically the most righteous form of government," he said, in substance, "an autocracy has merits that should not be overlooked. No city like Paris, for instance, could be reared by any mere commonality. It took centralized power to tear down the old city and rebuild it in its present loveliness. One of the first things that would follow the overthrow of the empire would be the destruction of the provisions for the safety and comfort of the very classes whose hands are now arrayed against it. Intelligent power in a few hands is necessarily better, if honestly administered, than the rule of ignorant masses. Paris is better governed than New York, or Philadelphia, or Washington. It is true that the French emperor takes eight million dollars a year to support his establishment, but in America the innumerable rings rob the people of ten times as much, without returning an equivalent. There may be countries where great power is grossly abused, but France is not one of them."

And so he went on for fifteen minutes or more; and after that Clarkson replied; and the guests of Miss Casson sided, some with one and some with the other; and the evening wore away.

On the whole Mordaunt enjoyed it. He wondered at the fluency which he had shown, for he had never before made an argument in such a public manner, and he flattered himself that he had done pretty well. When Miss Casson bade him good-night, she asked him in low tones whether he could make it convenient to call upon her the following afternoon, to which he willingly assented. Clarkson, who was near enough to note that there was a secret between them—a thing that rankled in his heart, because there never was one with himself—

passed down to the street with him, and they walked along for some distance together.

"It is a pleasant place to spend an evening," said Mordaunt, noticing that his companion seemed inclined to be taciturn.

"You like it, do you?" was the response.

"Yes. If I were to remain in the city I should go there often."

"You do not expect to remain in Boston?" said Clarkson, in a tone that rather implied pleasure at the information.

"Oh, no. Not more than a week or two, at the most."

"Then you will miss the bright particular star of the circle," said Clarkson, with an odd inflection. "His name is Darrell. You may have heard of him."

Mordaunt thought quickly. He did not mean to break his promise to Miss Casson, and yet he wanted to hear all he could about Darrell's connection with the house. The simplest, and easiest way—that of prevarication—was decided upon.

"I have heard of Mr. Darrell," he said. "I have a friend who knows him, and who tells me that he has decided to remain away for some time longer than he at first intended. Several months more, I think he said."

Clarkson looked thoughtful. Presently he asked, with a vain attempt to appear indifferent :

"Do you know whether his wife is with him?"

It was precisely because the question was such a thorough surprise to Mordaunt that he escaped the trap set for him, and merely echoed, "His wife!"

"I don't know positively that he is married," admitted Clarkson, "but that is the opinion of

many. Miss Casson shrewdly avoids the subject. I have a little curiosity to know, that is all. If he has a wife, she must know it. They have been intimate friends for a long time—eight years, I am told."

He said this more as if thinking aloud than as if talking to anybody.

"Miss Casson seems to be held in high esteem by her friends," suggested Mordaunt. "There surely can be no—no suspicion—"

Clarkson looked out into the night, and repeated dreamily the words of Miss Symonds, slightly varied :

"Suspicion ! Of Laura Casson !"

Mordaunt wondered whether there was any trace of irony in the answer, but he would not show that he thought of that.

"Exactly what I said," he replied. "The class of people who frequent her receptions would not tolerate her in that case."

"All classes go there," said Clarkson. "No one has to bring a certificate of character to enter a reception of that nature. But—you are a man of some experience in the ways of the world—supposing it turns out that he *is* married, what is the inference ?"

"Why, platonic friendship, I suppose."

"Do you believe in that sort of thing ?"

Mordaunt was trying to get at Clarkson's opinions, not to air his own, so he merely said, "Why not ?"

"Let us look at it for a moment, for the sake of the argument only, you know," mused the other. "If Darrell has a wife whom he never speaks of, never brings into society, what is the reason ?

Strained relations, probably. Given a man with a wife with whom he is on bad terms, and another woman with whom he is on good terms—what follows? Platonic friendship? Why, to be sure!"

He had ceased to disguise his sarcasm, and his hearer knew that for some reason he was very bitter on the subject.

"I seem fated to controvert your arguments to-night," said Mordaunt, smiling. "Allowing that Mr. Darrell is married—which is only a guess, a rumor, let us say—and that he fails for some reason to produce the body of his wife before the tribunal of public cynosure (to use a legal phrase), estrangement is by no means the only possible explanation. The lady may be an invalid, who cannot leave her room. She may be averse to all publicity, as so many women are. In either case, she may be fully aware of what her husband is doing, and glad to have him cultivate so refined an acquaintance. It is, at all events, something, it seems to me, of which the world at large has no right to demand an accounting. Miss Casson's character is supposed to be above question. Your very presence at her house shows that you have confidence in it. You would hardly continue to go there, I think, if you seriously doubted it."

"Oh, I would go anywhere," said Clarkson, abruptly. "I intend to write novels by-and-by."

"Who says that Darrell is married?" asked Mordaunt, after reflecting a moment on the peculiar quality of the reply.

"Oh, nobody says so. It seems to be in the air. People are constantly asking each other about it. If anybody could *say* so, that would settle it."

"It's a remarkable thing," said Mordaunt, slowly,

"that no one thinks of asking Miss Casson the question."

Clarkson looked at him again—with that direct, inquiring gaze of his.

"Would *you* do it?"

"If I knew her as well as you do, and wanted very much to know, I think I would. I should seize the proper time, of course, when it came in naturally in the course of the conversation."

A contemptuous smile greeted this answer.

"There is a proper time to kill a loon," said he, "but, though somewhat handy with a gun, I never succeeded in bagging an old one yet. Between the flash and the arrival of the shot the creature dives out of harm's way. Now a loon is a very wise and crafty bird, but he is simplicity itself when compared to a woman like this. If you don't believe me, try it sometime. Well, here is my corner Good-night."

Mordaunt's interest in Miss Casson was not lessened by this conversation, and it was with a feeling that the new sensation he coveted was about to assume a deeper interest, that he presented himself at her door on the following afternoon. She met him in a loose robe of white woolen goods, tied at the waist with a cord, which gave her something the appearance of a priestess. Her hair was rolled back from her high forehead, and her face, seen by daylight, was somewhat paler than it had been under the gas jets.

"I wanted to see you to-day," she said, after the ordinary greetings had been exchanged, "because I could say little to you last night in the presence of so many people. Mr. Darrell writes me that you are a most intimate friend of his. That statement

would of itself make you welcome in this house, but besides that I have taken a great interest in you personally, on account of what you said in the course of your argument last night."

She was certainly candid, but the frank way in which she spoke surprised him a little.

"Yes, Edmund and I have been friends from childhood," he said. "He has known you for a long time also, I believe?"

"Quite long; eight or nine years."

"Ah, before his marriage, then?"

He did not think it very good diplomacy to come to the point so soon, when the words were out of his mouth, but he had espied the joint in her armor and struck at it blindly. She met him without apparent discomposure.

"Yes, it was some months previous. I expected at that time to be a wife soon myself. Probably he told you of my—my misfortune."

Her voice faltered as she uttered the words, and he nodded a reply to the question. She paused a moment and then said:

"I need not ask you if you left Mr. Darrell well?"

"He was quite so."

"And happy?"

He had not anticipated the query. Was it the sympathizing friend or the jealous mistress who asked it?

"I can hardly say 'yes' to that," he replied. "Edmund does not seem to me as bright as he used to be. I was separated from him for several years, and on meeting him again I find a great change, and one that I do not like. He has lost much of his old cheerfulness. His head is full of communistic and revolutionary ideas, like those of Mr. Clarkson

whom I met here last night. They may or may not be correct, but I think they are bad for a man of his temperament. They weigh constantly on his mind. His spirits have lost their elasticity. He sees less than he ought of the fairness of the earth."

To his surprise this statement only brought a touch of sunshine into her face.

"He knows, as I do," she said, "that a great overturn is coming, and that it is a time for those who wish to help it onward to adopt a serious mien. Standing as he does to-day on ground which must so soon echo with the tread of an arisen people—perhaps be drenched with their best patriot blood—he does well to forswear personal pleasure."

He smiled at her earnestness.

"As we can never agree on that subject," said he, "perhaps it would be as well to talk about something else. I am glad to say, however, that our friend, in his desire to save the down-trodden serfs of a tyrannous despotism, does not forget the more important business of his journey. He is using all efforts to secure the patents that he wants for his invention. Perhaps when he has made a million or two he will develop into an aristocrat like the rest of us."

"You do not know him!" cried Miss Casson, with enthusiasm. "It is only the hope of gaining a fortune that he can use in our Cause that spurs him on. I think there is no doubt that when he is in possession of his magnificent income, he will devote it all to hastening the downfall of imperialism and the upbuilding of democracy throughout the world!"

Mordaunt's smile faded.

"All?" he repeated. "Every dollar for democracy, and nothing for wife and children?"

Her self-possession gave way in a moment, and the nails of her white hands buried themselves in the flesh.

"*Children!*" she gasped. And in a breath he knew that he had revealed a secret which he had not intended to do.

"Why not children as well as wife?" he asked, pretending not to understand. "Perhaps you are one of those who believe that a man's children should not inherit his goods. But you would hardly claim that the father, who is responsible for their existence, ought to leave them to starve while they are young and helpless. I can only think you do not mean to be taken literally when you say that Mr. Darrell should give *all* of his coming fortune to advance his theories."

"We ask no one to neglect making proper provision for his relations," she stammered. "He has a—a child—then?"

Mordaunt thought of Anna Darrell, and his heart grew very hard and cold.

"I said '*children*,'" he replied.

"I know—I understood you. But—sometimes people use the plural—"

She was hoping against hope, and the agony of the doubt was visible in every lineament. He thought it best to tell her everything, now he had gone so far.

"There are two; the elder seven, the younger three. If I had not supposed you knew, you may be sure I should not have alluded to the subject."

A criminal on the rack could hardly have suffered more than she did at that moment, and she felt compelled to bear the pain with the fortitude of a martyr.

"Mr. Darrell never spoke to me of—of such things," she enunciated, slowly. "I knew he was married, and I supposed—I understood—I mean, I thought very likely—there was a child. I did not know there was—another. And only three years old, you say?"

"So he told me," said Mordaunt, fearing lest the next question would be whether he had himself seen them. "You have never met Mrs. Darrell, I believe?"

She shook her head, making the greatest effort to appear calm.

"There was no reason why I should. Mr. Darrell and I are engaged in a social propaganda. We publish a magazine together. His private affairs or mine are never alluded to in our conversations. All that I ever knew of his marriage is that it was sudden—and—unfortunate."

Her voice had regained most of its natural strength, and she looked more like herself again.

"How unfortunate? In what respect?" he asked, determined to probe the matter as far as she would permit.

"I do not think I ought to say any more," she responded. "You are his friend, and if he has not chosen to tell you anything, I should be at least as reticent."

"He has told me a good deal," said Mordaunt. "I know he does not consider her his mental equal, if that is what you mean."

She bowed an affirmative.

"Is not that quite enough to justify the use of the word 'unfortunate,' in the case of a man like Edmund Darrell?" she asked.

"Perhaps," he admitted. "But, having rushed

precipitately into a marriage of this kind—in which the wife is an innocent victim—does he not owe her a fealty which the previously existing inequality of mind cannot shake?”

Miss Casson's agitation, while it had been well subdued, left her a more easy prey to the artfulness of her interlocutor. She wanted to justify Darrell and herself in the eyes of this persistent man.

“Probably you consider marriage a sacred thing under all conditions,” she said. “I do not. A man or a woman has not only no obligation—they have no right—to throw away all the possibilities of a lifetime on account of one deplorable error. I may as well speak plainly. Had Edmund Darrell continued the constant associate of an ignorant country girl he would inevitably have sunk to her level. He has a mind too noble to be thus destroyed. The thing to do when one discovers that he has committed a great mistake is to seek the remedy. In the instance of which we are speaking I believe an effort has been made to do this, or at least partially. If the wife had been as wise as the husband there would have been a separation long ago. It would have been better, I am sure, than continuing a marriage which is only a pretence, and an injury to them both, to say nothing of the—the children—so undesirable under such circumstances.”

Mordaunt smiled sarcastically.

“Making new arrangements, at the pleasure of either, would seem preferable to you, I presume,” he said.

She frowned, in spite of her determination not to do so.

“My views of the marriage relation are not, as you seem to think, lighter than those of most people, but

more intense," she replied. "To live with a woman after love has fled seems to me nothing short of a crime."

"Then new arrangements, at the pleasure of either, are of course quite proper," he persisted.

"I did not say that."

"But, excuse me, do you not think it?"

"It is not easy to make a rule to fit all cases," she responded, like an animal at bay. "What may be right for one may be wrong for another."

He decided to throw everything into the scale, then and there.

"But we are speaking of *this* case," he said, impressively. "The case of Edmund Darrell—and his wife—and you."

"And me!" she cried.

"And you."

Her slight bosom palpitated with the quick and short breaths.

"No one has a right to question me," she answered, proudly. "You are going too far."

She was not angry, he could see that very well, but she had suddenly grown quite determined.

"Miss Casson," said Mordaunt, quietly, "I do not know how we got into this strain in our conversation. I can say with truth that it was not premeditated by me. Believe it or doubt it, as you please, I am speaking as your friend and Darrell's. Now, can you two afford to brave the opinion of the world?"

The last words brought a ray of light into her features that chased away the darkness that had lingered there.

"The Cause that binds us," she said, "is so great, that beside its ordinary attractions do not deserve to

be even named. What, compared to it, are wives—and children—and lovers? They are ephemeral—they will be gone to-morrow—but the enfranchisement of mankind, the return to unborn generations of their long-stolen patrimony, that is something that will endure Forever !”

“In the meantime what is to become of the ephemerals?” asked Mordaunt. “Has Darrell ever proposed a separation from his wife, and if so, what provision would he think it proper to make for her?”

“I know nothing of that,” she answered. “I only know that his family hangs like a millstone about his neck, hindering him at every step he takes. If you are his true friend you will advise him to disburden himself. He will soon have money enough, and will be able to satisfy her.”

He nodded with a thoughtful air.

“You have never seen her, I think you said.”

“Never.”

“Then how can you say so coolly that dollars will recompense her for the husband she will lose?”

“Because I know the type !” she replied, growing earnest. “For eight years she has been his wife, and yet he has spent nearly every hour away from her. Has she followed him, remonstrated, done any of the things that a woman of force of character would have done? No, or I should have heard of it. How long do you think I would have endured that sort of treatment? Not a month! If she has been content with nothing but her support for eight years, it will content her still. Oh, it makes me hot with anger when I think of such a bloodless creature holding such a man in chains, when she has not in

her makeup a single element needed to round out his life !”

Miss Casson clasped her nervous hands above her head, and a tremor passed through her frame.

“A woman’s opinion of her lover’s wife is not likely to be of the fairest,” he said, stung by the slighting way in which she had spoken of Mrs. Darrell.

She fairly writhed under the words.

“What do you mean?” she cried. “Edmund Darrell was never any more a *lover* of mine—in the common acceptation of that term—than you are ! Nothing ever passed between us that the whole world might not have seen and welcome. He is my friend, my coadjutor, my counsellor, my partner, but my lover—no ! My views of marriage are, as I told you, holier than yours. Never, while another woman could claim him, even by the shallow fiction of law, could he be any more to me than he is. But let me do him justice. By no word, look or insinuation has he violated the strictest rules, in all his intercourse with me.”

He was impolite enough to tell her that some people had thought otherwise.

“Yes,” she answered, “seeing me reflected in the impure mirror of their own minds. What they think is nothing to me so long as none of them broach the subject, and that the most intimate of my friends have not dared to do. You are the first who has had the temerity to catechize me, and for some reason which I hardly understand I have condescended to set you right, I think it was because I wanted you to believe in me. And you do, do you not ?”

It was an appeal uttered with startling earnestness,

and he replied with truth that he did believe in her. She leaned toward him, caught one of his hands and pressed it.

"Don't think I am boasting," she said. "I make no platform for others. I criticise no man or woman who find themselves unable to bear the weight when a loveless marriage separates them. I speak only of myself and Edmund Darrell."

She released his hand almost as soon as she took it, but in the brief space that her fingers touched him he realized what an influence she might have on a man who loved her, if she chose to exert it. Her pulses had beaten time with his for twenty seconds.

"You do not expect Mr. Darrell very soon?" he said, interrogatively.

"Not until late in the autumn," she replied, with a touch of sadness in her voice. "I need him just now very much, but it is necessary that he should stay. Forgive a woman's curiosity, but you said something about the opinion of people in relation to us. Did you hear gossip connecting our names last night?"

He bowed.

"How did it come about?"

"A question arose as to whether Edmund was married."

"Yes?"

"The answer was that it was strange, if he were, that his wife was never seen with him."

Her eyes dilated with gratification.

"I think no one in my circle really knows," she said. "And you will not tell?"

He asked why she cared whether they knew or not.

"Because it would give rise to petty annoyances,

and perhaps injure us in the business we have to do. The world is very big—is it not—when a man as well known as he can have a family within a hundred and fifty miles, and no one here the wiser?"

He assented, though he did not share her evident delight, and soon after they parted. She inquired whether he would probably attend the next *soirée*, and he told her it was doubtful, as he had some private business that might take him out of town. But whenever he returned, he said, he should certainly see her.

When Mordaunt had gone, Laura Casson turned to her mirror and was not surprised to see a bit of color in her cheeks. She thought she had not felt better since Edmund went away. Then she recollected, all at once, what she had learned about the little Ethel, and she wept for an hour as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHY DO YOU VISIT HER?"

Back to the village of Auburn, back to that bit of modern Arcadia, rode Harry Mordaunt. The flying train sped merrily through the fair land of Middlesex, the rising ground of Worcester and the hilly country of Hampshire. The traveller, alone in a corner of his Pullman, went over the events of the last fortnight, retracing, foot by foot, the space he had traversed. Again he saw Anna Darrell at the church, her eyes fixed on the clergyman, but her

heart, he had no doubt, very, very far away. He saw her on her own premises, under the pine trees, and then in her parlor watching him turn the leaves of his guide to Paris. In every look and act there was mirrored devotion to the absent one, who so little deserved it all. Then he found himself thinking of the domestic joys that would be possible with a partner like Anna. It chilled him to think of such a woman left, like a wild rose, to bloom, wither and fall by the wayside.

Confirmed bachelor as he was, it seemed to him that had he met a girl like this ten years sooner all his life might have been changed. Anna knew nothing of the world, but it would have been exquisite pleasure to teach her. She had never travelled beyond the confines of her own county; but how much more delightful she would have been, on the voyages that had taken him to every clime, than a blasé companion who had seen everything before, and could find nothing to awake more than the most languid interest. Her simple manners might cause a smile in some ultra-refined circles; but had he had this wild rose to develop all that would long since have been past.

The train stopped at a station and he looked out at the people who were gathered there. As the wheels began to revolve again it occurred to him that he was dreaming of impossible things. He must think, not of what might have been, but of what was. He had not met Anna in the golden days of their youth. She was now his friend's wife. No greater chasm could be imagined between them than this. These reflections gave him a sort of chill, and to the surprise of his over-heated neighbors, he

asked the porter to come and close the window next to him.

Then there passed through his mind the particulars of his interview with Miss Casson. His summing up was that she was a clever, intellectual, hard-hearted woman. For, it must be remembered, he had not seen her in tears. He was surprised, on the whole, at her statement in relation to the innocence of her relations with Darrell, or rather, surprised that he believed her, as he unquestionably did. Mordaunt had a notion that he could read character in faces. Had her statement come to him in the form of a letter, he might have scoffed at it, because he was not an expert in hand-writing, and all the probabilities pointed in an opposite direction. But he had seen and heard her, and no shadow of doubt was left that she spoke the truth.

As he thought it all over, he could not tell whether the state of affairs that he had found would tend to complicate or simplify the thing he most desired—the reuniting of the husband and wife. If Miss Casson had held Darrell for eight years and more by the mere strength of her intellectual domination, what was to prevent her from holding him indefinitely? If he had not been drawn to his wife during that long time by her beauty and sweetness—if his charming children had no influence to keep him at home—what could do it? To Mordaunt Anna came in the guise of a revelation. He had never seen anything like her. But to Edmund she was now an old story, and what was there to throw into the scale?

It seemed a hopeless task that the dreamer in the Pullman car had set himself to do.

At the Auburn House Landlord Upham welcomed

him heartily. He had taken a great liking to Mor-daunt, who had whiled away many a lonesome hour in his company, both about the quiet hotel and in making various trips to places in the vicinity by means of a horse and buggy from the landlord's well-stocked stables. He had said nothing to Mrs. Darrell about his intention of leaving town for a few days, feeling that he could not do so without conveying an intimation that he thought her more interested than there was any reason to suppose she would be in the movements of one who was so recently a total stranger to her. He thought, as he ate his supper, that it would be a good idea to wait a day or two before he called on her ; but as he strolled out, with cigar lighted, the inclination came too strongly upon him, and he turned almost involuntarily toward her house. Arriving at her gate he hesitated. Till that minute he had really believed that all he meant to do was to pass the house, unless—he made this mental reservation—she should happen to be out of doors and see him. But it was too cool that week for comfortable sitting under the shade trees, and he saw a light in the parlor that betokened where she was.

One of the curtains was not drawn low enough to wholly hide the interior, and he could see her at a table, reading, probably the volume he had left with her. No one else was visible and her quiet attitude implied that she was alone. Clearly it was an opportunity not to be thrown away. Tossing his half-used cigar into the street, he swung back the gate, letting it slam purposely behind him, and rang the bell. A moment later he was receiving a pleasant smile of recognition and an invitation to be seated in the parlor

"I am afraid you have come for your book," she said, pointing to it on the table where she had just laid it down. "I thought once that I ought to send it to the hotel, but I have been very busy and have hardly finished it. However—"

"You are quite wrong," he interrupted, not wishing to lose the advantage offered by the opening. "I have no use whatever for the volume, and you are welcome to keep it as long as you like. I have been out of town for several days and only returned on this evening's train. While I like Auburn very much and mean to spend some time here, I have almost no acquaintances in the village outside of Mr. Upham and his family. So when I strolled out after supper, and happened to pass your house, and saw that your parlor was lighted up, I thought perhaps you would take pity on a lonesome man and allow me to inflict my presence on you for a few minutes."

She was used to plain, straightforward ways—this country woman—and she answered him from her heart:

"I have told you before that you are always welcome here, Mr. Allen, and I should be sorry to think you had passed the house without calling. If you have so few friends in Auburn, I shall hope to see all the more of you."

"You are very kind," he replied, much impressed with her frankness. "I think it must be impossible for one like you, who has lived so long here, to understand the oppressive loneliness of the place at first to one who, like me, has passed all of his life in much more busy localities. It is true I came here for the very change of which I speak—the change from the hurly-burly of travel and of cities to the calm peace of the country. But at first the stillness

—the lack of animation, of crowds, of the rattle and noise to which I had been so long accustomed—almost drove me mad. When you add to that the absence of any one to talk to except the hotel people and the occasional transient guests there, it is no wonder that I found it difficult to stick to my resolution and remain. I do not wish to alarm you, but I fear your husband will experience something of the same feeling when he returns from Europe, though, of course, he will have the advantage over me of wife and children to mitigate the effect.”

He had not intended to utter the concluding sentence. It may almost be said to have uttered itself. He had got into a habit of letting his words flow as they pleased when he talked with her.

There are undoubtedly advantages to be acquired from residence in cities, not the least of which is the habit of saying what you do not mean, and the quite as prevalent one of doubting what others say to you. Anna Darrell, whose life had been passed among primitive surroundings, was unfortunately ignorant of both of these accomplishments. More than this, she had no notion of the extent to which Auburn had discussed her family affairs. She had no idea that a gentleman who happened to stay a week at the hotel would be likely to hear anything whatever about her private history. She heard his remark without the least suspicion, and replied with the frankness that she applied to everything :

“Mr. Darrell is obliged by his business to be absent from home a good deal,” she said. “I think he has the feeling that you have expressed about country places. He never seems content while in Auburn.”

He pushed relentlessly the opportunity to say

that he supposed he was mistaken, then, in the supposition that she had passed the whole of her life there.

"No, you are not," she replied, with slightly increasing color. "Since I was brought here a child I have never been twenty miles from this spot. My husband thinks it is the best place for the children—Auburn is famous for its health, you know. When he travels he has every moment occupied, and the constant change from hotel to hotel and from city to city, would, he thinks, be unpleasant for me."

There was a good deal of hesitation in this speech, and Mordaunt marked each inflection with the deepest interest. He had no doubt whatever of her loyalty. What he wished to know was whether she was contented with the life she was leading; whether she was willingly separated months at a time from her husband. If she were really satisfied that things should continue as they were, why should he trouble himself about her? He felt for a moment that there was truth in Miss Casson's arraignment of a woman who could endure it for eight years without a protest. Then he took a look at the face before him, and marked the slight flush that had come with her answer.

He meant to know whether she cared, and how much. He might not find out that evening, but—he meant to know.

"And you never feel lonesome here, during these long journeys, when you are without him?" he asked, taking care not to put too much meaning into his tone.

"I—I have the children."

"Ah, to be sure!" he replied. "I suppose they are in bed before this hour. I have thought of them

often. They are great company for you, especially the elder one. Still, it must be a deprivation to have their father gone so much. Not only for you, if you will let me say it, but for him. I never married, nor do I think I ever shall, but if I did I would never consent to go into any business that would take me away from my family. It seems to me that no remuneration, however great, would compensate for such a loss. I might make occasional trips, but to travel without them, month after month, year after year, it would simply be impossible for me. I hope, for all your sakes, that Mr. Darrell will make his fortune early in life and retire from business. It would be quite like another honeymoon when you had him all the time again."

This was bold enough, if what he wanted was to provoke a response. The rounded bosom of the wife rose and fell with a rapidity that revealed the agitation she was trying her best to conceal. He offered her an opportunity to speak, but she could not trust herself with words just then.

"I once knew a steamer captain," he continued, seeing that he was making an impression, "who was obliged on account of his profession to be absent from his wife five weeks at a time. He told me that she had all she could do during the first year of their marriage to keep him from throwing up his position, which was a very good one, as those things go. I crossed the Atlantic with him several times, and, after once unbosoming himself to me on the subject, it seemed as if he could talk of nothing else. 'I've got the finest boat on this line,' he used to say, 'and I draw as good pay as any of them, but I'm not going to stand this all my life, with me on the sea or at Liverpool, and my Martha and the little ones at

New York. No, sir. We're just saving every penny we can get our hands on, and as soon as there's enough to pay for a decent interest in a sailing vessel I'll change my keel and go as an ordinary skipper. It's against the rules of this line for an officer to have any of his relations aboard, even if he pays their passage, but on a barque or schooner I can take them all, and there's no one to hinder.' The last time I was in New York I met him in the street, and his face shone like the brass plates on a new engine. 'I've got a craft now,' he said, 'where I can take them all, and we're going to sail next week for the Cape of Good Hope. My cabin ain't quite as roomy as the house we've had in Harlem, and the back-yard is rather restricted, and the profits won't be likely to come up to the salary I got on the steamer, but *we'll be together!*' As he grasped my hand with his great paw, nearly dislocating all the joints, I realized all the happiness he felt, and congratulated him warmly before going to a drug store for a bottle of arnica."

He threw in the witticism at the end, for he saw a drooping at the corners of her mouth, like that of a child who is on the point of crying. He was afraid to let her say anything, and he went on.

"You know the saying, Mrs. Darrell, that 'old maids have the best children.' It must seem quite ridiculous to hear a bachelor enthusing over the delights of constant association between husband and wife, but my theories are harmless ones, or will be if they don't bore you too much. I am not single from conviction that it is the best state in which to live, but merely because the woman whom I could love as I think a wife should be loved never came across my path. When I do marry, if you chance to know

me then, I will show you a pattern of devotion. I met once, out in Africa, an English nobleman, who was returning with his wife from a tour of hundreds of miles through the heart of that savage country. She had been with him for three years, where no white woman had ever gone before, dressed for convenience in a semi-masculine costume, carrying a gun and riding a horse with as much ease as any man in the party. The husband told me that he had got ready to go on this journey without her and went to bid her good-by, when they both discovered that they simply could not endure it. It was impossible to give up the expedition, and there was nothing for the wife to do but pack a hand-bag and go along. She took a comb and brush—and a little mirror, of course—and just as few other things as was possible. For three years she had been, he told me, not only no impediment to him in those wilds, but a real pleasure and assistance. I almost envied that couple, I assure you. If I could find a woman like that I might give up my own condition of single blessedness.”

He laughed at this in a way that was quite contagious, and she could not help smiling a little. It was easier for her to listen to this man than to talk to him. He thought it best to leave the subject where it was, and accordingly began to discuss the Paris book, which he took up and opened. By deft questioning, he found that she had read most of it, and that it interested her.

“I have never read many books,” she said simply, “but I mean to now. The children are less care than they were, and I shall have more time.”

“May I send for some of mine and lend them to you?” he asked, impetuously. “I have rows and

rows of them in New York, doing no good to anybody."

"You are kind to offer it," she replied, "but I would prefer to buy my books and keep them. I would like you to give me a little list of some that you think I would need, though, if it would not be asking too much."

"On the contrary," he said, quickly, "I shall be delighted. What will you have? Have you any choice among the poets? History—that is always interesting. Novels, books of travel and adventure—you see there are so many books, one never reads half of them. I will write you a list, just a few that I think you will like, though very likely there will be some that you have already."

"You need not be afraid that you will include many that I have read," she admitted. "I have never cared much for books; but now I want them. Yes," she repeated, "I want a good many of them. I mean to read much, and your advice will be of great value."

Before he went away that evening he led her into a discussion regarding Auburn and its surroundings, and she gave him much information regarding the place and people. Talking on a subject with which she was familiar, her countenance threw off its partially constrained expression, and she grew animated.

"I suppose you have relatives here," he said, when he had finished laughing at one of her descriptions.

"Only two," she replied, growing suddenly sober. "An unmarried brother and sister of my father. They are quite old-fashioned people. My Uncle Ephraim never goes anywhere, and my aunt took offence at my marriage, and now she never calls,

either. I might almost say I have no relations in Auburn at all."

It did not seem strange to her that she told him this. She had known him nearly two weeks, and Auburn was Arcadia over again.

After that night he called often. There was nothing else in Auburn that interested him, spite of the little fables with which he met the few inhabitants with whom he had occasion to discuss its beauties of scenery. He yawned away the mornings over newspapers and the latest light literature. He disposed of the afternoon, either at the billiard table, when he could find any one to play with, or exploring the country roads when he could not. He did not mean to call on Mrs. Darrell every evening, but he usually managed to see her at some hour in the twenty-four. He attended every local affair that was worth going to—and many that were not—and it happened curiously that she always knew he would be there and managed to be present herself. A local band gave concerts Monday and Wednesday evenings on the Common. There was a "praise meeting" Friday night. He had not quite got himself up to the point where he attended the Saturday evening prayer meeting, but he rather liked the singing, especially since he found that Anna's voice was one of those he would hear. There were several Sunday-school and temperance society pic-nics at Auburn Lake Grove, in which he developed an astonishing interest, and she was usually on the committee of arrangements.

Sunday there was the sermon, of course, which he never missed. He could sit in Mr. Upham's pew and see her profile for an hour. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays he was pretty sure to "drop in" after supper, and many other times he

"happened" to walk home with her from some public occasion and talk half an hour at the gate before they parted. In this way he found it worth his while to remain in Auburn all the rest of the summer.

To be sure, he went away occasionally, for a few days at a time, to New York or Boston, generally Boston. Miss Casson gave up her Thursday evenings during August, but received regularly on Sundays. There were so many of her followers, she said, who were unable to leave with the fashionable crowd which thronged the seashore and mountain resorts, that she felt it her duty to open her doors at least once a week, even though she had sometimes to come from a long distance to do so. Once or twice Mordaunt remained over until Monday at her request, for private interviews, but there was very little said on these occasions that is worth recording. All she seemed to desire was to reassure him of her regard, and to avail herself of his information in reference to certain events that were transpiring. They always spoke about Darrell, in a general way, but both were careful to avoid being drawn into another argument, in which they would be sure to differ.

At the Sunday evening affairs, Clarkson, who never failed to materialize, seemed to grow moodier week by week. Those who knew him best were completely at a loss to account for his manner. Mrs. St. John remarked several times to Miss Everest that he had become so dull she was almost sorry for bringing him. But Clarkson could never be dull in the eyes of Miss Everest. She listened to every word that he uttered as if it were the speech of an oracle. She could see without the least trouble that

he had taken a jealousy of Mordaunt, for which she was quite confident he had no just grounds. In fact, he seemed displeased at every sign of confidence which Miss Casson had with any of her other guests, and was clearly the unhappiest of men.

One evening he designedly left the house in company with Mordaunt, and as soon as they were alone he launched into the subject that was consuming him.

"I want you to tell me one thing," he said, nervously. "I demand it as a right, as a matter of fairness between man and man. Let me know without equivocation. Do you love Miss Casson?"

Until he reached the words themselves, Mordaunt had no conception of what he meant to say. He had supposed that the coming question would refer entirely to Edmund Darrell. But as he glanced at Clarkson's pale face he could not help seeing that he was terribly in earnest.

"Such an idea never entered my head," he replied, candidly, repressing his inclination to say that it was none of his business.

"Then why," continued the other, in a half-phoking voice, "why do you visit her in private?"

Mordaunt bridled a little at this.

"You have been acting the spy, have you?" he said, coldly.

"Yes!" cried Clarkson. "When a man is in my condition of mind he will do anything. I love her! She knows it! I think everybody knows it! When I first found it out Darrell was in the way. He had gone out of the city, but people were always talking about him when they mentioned her name. Four months have passed, and still he does not return. Some are saying that he never will. I was

just beginning to have hope when you came. She pays more attention to you than to any one else who attends her soirées. You go to her house on other days and remain for hours. *Why* is it, if there is no love between you? *Why*, I say!" And he paused on the sidewalk overcome by the violence of his emotions.

Mordaunt found his angry feelings melting away before the evident suffering of his companion.

"Mr. Clarkson," he began, slowly, "the three or four conferences which I have had with Miss Casson have been solely on business matters. If I had any intention of marrying, I assure you she would be the last person in the world of whom I should think in that connection. As far as I am concerned, you may set your mind wholly at rest."

Clarkson searched his face, and seemed satisfied of the truthfulness of this answer.

"But about Darrell," he asked, suddenly. "Can you tell me whether I am in danger from him?"

"I have no right to say anything about that," was the reply. "I think, however, that Mr. Darrell has no intention whatever of offering marriage to the lady in question."

"But she loves him!"

"They are friends of many years standing, that is all. I am quite sure that matrimony is thought of by neither of them."

Clarkson grasped Mordaunt's hand warmly.

"Thank you!" he exclaimed, with fervor. "You have given me new life!"

Mordaunt regarded him with great curiosity.

"It does not follow," he pursued, "that Miss Casson will look with favor upon *your* suit. I incline to the belief that she is single from choice and means

to remain so. She is not young," he added, pointedly ; "past her teens at least, and too full of ambition and socialistic purposes, I should say, to think much of anything else."

But Clarkson would not so easily give up the hopes which he had formed.

"I know what you think," he said—"that I am too much her junior. I have no doubt she is three or four years older than I. This should be no objection on her part, and if I am content, who is to care? She is bound up in Socialism, you say. Well, I am no less so. She has not an opinion on that subject which I do not share. Why should she treat me as she does?"

He looked so pitiable that Mordaunt found his sympathies increasing, to his great surprise.

"If you wish me to advise you—" he began, and stopped short.

"That is just it!"

"Well, then, I should say, to begin with, that women are not won in the way you have adopted."

Clarkson did not speak, but he listened attentively.

"How may a woman be won?" pursued Mordaunt, speaking like a Professor of the science. "By exciting in her breast admiration at first, and affection afterward. No man can excite admiration who exhibits a bad temper at the slightest provocation, who never is seen to smile, and who shows irritability on all occasions. Such conduct must breed aversion, no matter how favorably the lady might have been inclined toward the suitor."

Clarkson broke in, at that, savagely :

"How easy it is to preach! You would have me smile, I suppose, and act the part of unconcern when

my heart is being torn by the coldness she shows to me and the warmth she gives to others."

"The Spartan boy did just that," replied Mordaunt. "He smilingly denied having stolen the fox which was at the moment gnawing him to death under his coat. He did that merely to avoid being proved a thief. Cannot you do as much for a woman you love?"

A groan was his only answer.

"The man whose hand trembles can never expect to hit a bull's-eye," said Mordaunt, fluently. "The English language is full of proverbs to fit your case: 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' 'None but the brave deserve the fair.' I do not say that you can ever marry Laura Casson, but I do tell you that your greatest need is courage. Yes, courage!" he repeated, putting his hand on the other's shoulder. "And I will add this, if it will do you any good. I wish with all my heart that she would accept you, and that the ceremony could take place to-morrow."

"Why?" asked Clarkson, looking at him searchingly.

"I have my reasons."

"If there is any way in which you can aid me, then I may call upon you?"

"Certainly. Here is my address, both here and in New York. I am absent a good deal, but my mail is promptly forwarded."

"I cannot leave you without repeating that I do not think Miss Casson desires to marry," added Mordaunt, as they parted. "But for all that I wish you well, and shall be pleased if I hear of your success. Only, remember two or three things. Go to her hereafter with a cheerful face. Don't look like a thunder cloud if she speaks to some

other man. Don't press your attentions unduly. And above all things remember that Rome was not built in a day, and that Jacob served fourteen years for Rachel. Au revoir !"

The summer wore on. Mordaunt did not go to Boston again for some weeks, but stayed in Auburn, where things were more to his liking. Steadily he had grown in the good graces of Mrs. Darrell, until she listened for his step as naturally as she did for those of her children, and found herself growing impatient if he did not come at his usual hour. Sometimes he took little Alice and Ethel to ride in his wagon and both of them grew very fond of him. He could not take their mother—that would have passed the limits even of Auburn decorum, but he generally contrived to let her know in which direction he intended to drive of an afternoon, and she somehow happened to take the same roads with her little ones and meet him at some place where they could rest their horses under the trees and gain another hour's chat together. The two or three farmers who chanced to see them while thus engaged never gave the matter a second thought. They took off their hats with old-fashioned courtesy to Mrs. Darrell, and Mordaunt lost nothing of their esteem by raising his own with equal grace in return.

Not a look was ever exchanged, not a word was ever spoken, that all America might not have seen and heard—if only all America were not so suspicious and unreasonable.

Anna had procured the books he told her of, and read them with avidity. Most of the conversations which they held referred to the great poets or dramat-

ists or historians and their works. He knew so much that interested her, now that this new world was so suddenly opened up. Her respect for his knowledge grew with every day they were together. To her untutored mind he was an encyclopædia of all learning. But once, when she hinted as much, he laughed and said he had wasted the time that he should have devoted to study and was called upon too often to realize the depths of his own ignorance.

"If you call yourself ignorant, what must you think of me?" she asked, with self-abnegation.

"Oh, you will soon surpass your instructor," he said, smiling. "Had your opportunities been as good as mine I should have had to blush more than I do now for my misspent hours. Since I left college I have had nothing to do and have done a great deal of it. You have formed a taste for reading, and will soon be familiar with the best authors. When I leave Auburn you will have more time, as I shall not be coming in to disturb your evenings."

She turned very white, and was conscious of a momentary giddiness.

"You—will—leave Auburn?" she articulated.

"Not yet; but by-and-by, I suppose I shall have to go. I have stayed much longer than I at first intended. You have made it very pleasant for me here."

He said this guardedly, ready to qualify the expression if she wished it, but she did not seem to take alarm.

"It is you who have made it pleasant for me," she replied, with her eyes on the ground.

He laughed, thinking it would cheer her, and said he was glad if he had done so. "But," he added, "you know you are expecting your husband home

soon. After his long absence he will hardly care to share even a little of your time with strangers."

She called to the children, without replying, telling them to return at once to the pony carriage. They had wandered into an adjacent field, and came back with their hands full of wild-flowers.

Mordaunt drove back to town, as was his custom, by a roundabout road, and was much astonished and annoyed, when he happened to glance at the register of the hotel, to see the name "George Clarkson," written in a bold hand thereon. He immediately sought out the landlord and called his attention to the signature.

"I do not want that man to know that I am here," he said. "You may send my meals to my room until further notice."

As he turned around, he found Clarkson at his elbow, and knew that every word he had uttered must have been heard by him. But he was not in the least disconcerted. Extending his hand he exclaimed with incredible glibness :

"Hallo ! What the devil brings you down to this God-forsaken place ?"

CHAPTER IX.

"MY HUSBAND! YOU KNOW HIM?"

Mr. George Clarkson had made rapid progress since that evening when he and Mordaunt had talked so long together after leaving Laura Casson's house. So marked was the change in his demeanor that Miss Casson could not help noticing it, and it very favorably impressed her. She treated him with more cordiality than before, and raised his hopes so high that he restrained himself with difficulty from a too precipitate avowal of his love. But still, between him and the object he had in view, Edmund Darrell always arose like a spectre. He heard a good deal about him from Miss Everest and others, and whispers that he was soon expected home began to trouble him seriously. It was hardly possible to maintain the serenity of expression upon which he had resolved.

The question whether Darrell was already married was often broached, and Clarkson determined to settle it if he could. It was not advisable to make too many inquiries of the circle at Miss Casson's, and for some time he progressed slowly; but one day, while looking over an old Boston directory, he hit by pure accident upon the right thread. Accompanying the name of Darrell's firm were these words:
• "Edmund Darrell, house at Auburn, Mass."

Here was a clue indeed! Reference to later directories showed that the words last quoted were missing, which convinced Clarkson that they had been omitted either by special request or on account of

change in residence. At any rate, it was an easy thing to go to Auburn and make investigations. Somebody there would be sure to know the Darrell family, and in case they had moved away the postmaster would undoubtedly have the new address. The question of wife and children could be solved much easier where the Darrells lived than in Boston.

As there was but one hotel in Auburn, Clarkson could not very well avoid running across Mordaunt about the first thing he did. Neither of the men was glad to see the other there, for each felt that his movements would now have to be to some extent restricted. Mordaunt suspected from the first the real nature of Clarkson's errand, and saw that it was likely to interfere with his cosy visits to Mrs. Darrell. He could not, however, have imagined the extent to which the lover would go in his desire to remove Edmund from his path. He could not foresee that he would make the acquaintance of Miss Burton and pour into her too willing ear (under the strictest promise to conceal the name of her informant) all that he knew or guessed about Darrell's visits to Miss Casson. Mordaunt thought at first of telling him the truth, hoping that it would shorten his stay, but in order to do this it might be necessary to explain some things about which he did not care to be interrogated.

In this way several weeks went by, during which the two men became a constant nuisance to each other. They had to pretend friendship when they met, and they played a game of billiards together once in a while, but neither was in the least deceived. Clarkson soon found out what he came to learn and had the additional satisfaction of getting Aunt Burton to help him in his work. He might have left

town then, except for his wish to watch Mordaunt, whose presence there troubled him not a little. He went to Boston each Saturday, not liking to miss seeing the object of his adoration on Sunday evening, but he always returned on the Monday morning train. Had it not been for this brief respite, Mordaunt might have had the unpleasant experience of living in that dull village week after week, without even speaking to the woman whose presence chained him there. When she asked him why he did not call oftener he made evasive replies, which caused her no little distress. He had always seemed so frank about everything, that the least symptom of hesitation gave her much uneasiness. She assigned every reason but the right one to his changed manner, and the situation grew very unpleasant for them both.

Miss Burton was not, as may be imagined, willing to leave Anna in ignorance of what she had learned. When Anna declined to do anything but wait until her husband came home, her aunt paid an immediate visit to the office of the village lawyer, Mr. Jacobs, and directed him to draw up, without delay, a new will for her brother Ephraim. The lawyer knew the Burtons well enough to be sure that Ephraim would sign anything that his sister told him to, and readily promised to set about the work at once. He was rather busier than usual that week, however, and Miss Burton got quite uneasy.

"Has Jacobs said anything more to you about the new will?" she asked her brother, when nearly a fortnight had gone by.

"Only that he's very busy and is going to write it as soon as he can."

"How long did he think we were going to wait

for him?" snapped the woman, her black eyes dilating. "You tell him to-morrow that if he doesn't get it done this week I shall go over to Brixton."

"Yes, Mettie."

"If anything should happen to you," continued Miss Burton, "every penny of our money would go to those Darrells after I am through with it. I hate to have it left in that way a day longer. I have told Anna out-and-out what we are going to do, and if she won't listen to reason she must take the consequences."

"Yes, Mettie."

Ephraim might have been only a lay figure with a capacity for uttering set phrases for all the initiative he ever took with his sister. She went on talking to him, more to free her mind than because it made the least difference whether he agreed with her or not.

"That young Mr. Clarkson coming here at this time was very fortunate," she proceeded. "After what he told me I was sure that the rumors I had heard in Boston were true. Anna pretended not to believe a word, as long as there was any use in pretending, and then said 'she should wait until her husband came home, to give him a chance to deny it, if he would.' I never was so out of patience in my life. Of course he will deny it, and she is just ninny enough to believe him! Oh, the stuff and nonsense she talked to me! 'She couldn't believe anything about the father of her children,' she said. 'Perhaps she hadn't done her whole duty herself.' 'He was a literary man and couldn't be expected to stay in a dull place like Auburn.' You can believe I knew how to answer her. 'You've had eight years or more of this sort of marriage,' I said, 'and I should think that was long enough trial to give any

man. He has been gone this time most six months and you are getting to be the laughing stock of the whole place. When he comes back, you'll run down the walk to meet him, as you've always done, and throw your arms around his neck. It is disgusting! And he off flirting with other women, while you are slaving for his young ones!' Of course she cried, and said, 'she couldn't believe he could do anything wrong, and that she loved him very much'—faugh!—and all that sort of thing. I never could have thought a Burton would act so!"

The spinster paused from sheer exhaustion at her own rapid speech.

"I told her not to be a little dunce, but to stand up for her rights like a woman," she went on, presently, to the lay figure. I said, "'Here is the name where he visits at Boston, and the very street and number. Will you go down there or send some one to watch them when he comes from Europe? You can get a divorce and make him pay a good sum as alimony.' But she wouldn't consent to anything. She would only say that when he came she would ask him about it, and she couldn't tell what she would do until she heard his side of the story. Then I got provoked in earnest. 'You haven't anything of your own,' I said, 'but this house, and I suppose you are relying on me to support you when your fine husband goes off for good with his sweetheart. Now let me tell you that you won't ever get a dollar of mine as long as you stick to that man. When he stops sending his checks you can go to the poor-house for all of me. I will have the will changed before I am a week older.' And then I walked out of the house, leaving her crying like a baby. Oh! I wish she had half of my spunk! She wouldn't go on

year after year letting that Darrell fool her as he does !”

“Yes, Mettie.”

There seemed to be nothing to call for any other reply on the part of the lay figure. A few minutes later the clock struck nine and the signal was immediately recognized by both of them. For thirty years and more they had gone to bed at nine o'clock and risen at five, summer and winter. Ten minutes after the ninth stroke had died away both of them were sound asleep.

Aunt Mettie's prompt call as soon as she had her story to tell, did not add to Anna Darrell's peace of mind. The spinster had not crossed the threshold for a long time before the day when she came with the bomb in her hands and threw it without pity into the quiet house. To entertain a dim fear that her husband had improper reasons for his long absences was one thing ; to have a name given her, with a number and street, was quite another. She had no one to go to—poor child!—with her troubles. And it seemed especially hard, just at this time, that “Mr. Allen,” whose presence had been such a consolation, should come so seldom and at his infrequent visits appear so constrained and unnatural.

The situation grew so painful at last that Mor-daunt resolved, at whatever cost, to have an understanding with Clarkson. One evening they strolled down the street together and he opened the conversation.

“How much longer do you expect to stay in Auburn.”

Clarkson laughed.

“It is a curious thing that I was just on the point of asking you the same question,” he said.

"Oh, as for me," responded Mordaunt, "I may stay here forever, for all I know. Being without any business, one place is the same to me as another."

"You seem to find this one very agreeable," said the other, in a sly tone.

Mordaunt couldn't help understanding this insinuation and he flushed hotly. But he only said—

"Yes, very."

Clarkson laughed again.

"We might as well be honest with each other," he said, in a familiar tone. "You know what brought *me* here, and I know what keeps *you* here. I have found out what I came to learn. And you—"

He paused, appearing to think that the sentence did not need finishing, but his look was sufficiently expressive.

"You came here," said Mordaunt, slowly, biting off the end of his cigar, "to find out whether Edmund Darrell was married."

"Precisely."

"I could have told you that the night you arrived, or last August, in Boston, when you wanted to know; or years and years ago, if I had had the honor of your acquaintance."

Clarkson looked not only astonished but incredulous.

"Years ago!" he repeated.

"Certainly. Darrell and I were school-boys together. We have been as intimate as men can be. I left him last June in Paris, where we stayed at the same hotel. He writes to me every week."

Clarkson stared more and more.

"There is some mystery about this," he said. "Why do they call you 'Allen' at the hotel and in the village?"

"For a very good reason," was the response. "It is my name."

"But there are places where they call you by another name."

"Let me set your mind at rest," said Mordaunt, coolly. "I have three names. I was not obliged to tell Miss Casson which was my last one."

"And still I say there is a mystery," pursued Clarkson, more puzzled than ever. "You say you are Darrell's friend. You have passed months here and called frequently on his wife. Now it appears that when you go to Boston you give Miss Casson an assumed name. You interest yourself in this matter month after month, though it compels you to spend most of the summer in the dullest town of America. And Darrell," he paused to sum up, "remains abroad. What is it all for? A-h!" he exclaimed, as if a light had dawned upon him. "I think I see!"

"What do you think you see?" asked Mordaunt, inclined to be amused.

"You came here to watch the wife," responded Clarkson, stealthily. "The husband wants a divorce."

"I am not flattered by your ridiculous guess," said Mordaunt, with great dignity. "Can't you conceive it possible that a man may be actuated by proper motives? There is no mystery whatever in my movements. I have traveled for years and am tired of excitement. I came here because the place is secluded and I am less likely to run across bores. Knowing Darrell caused me to make this selection. There you have it."

Clarkson was lost in thought for several moments.

"If this is true," he said, finally, "you ought to be

as anxious as I am to keep Darrell away from Miss Casson's."

"Why?"

"On his wife's account."

"I think she is able to manage alone her own affairs. He has been going there for eight years, remember."

He had no intention of making a confidant of this man, whatever else he might do.

"She doesn't care, then!" exclaimed Clarkson.

"All women are not monomaniacs," said Mordaunt. "Mrs. Darrell has never alluded to the subject in my presence. She adores her husband, and to do that it is natural to suppose that she must have confidence in him. He makes no secret of the fact that he and Miss Casson are attached friends. Why, I went to her with a letter of introduction from him."

He found that he was saying more than he meant to, and resolved to control his words.

"Does she know that he is married?" Clarkson asked, desperately.

"Ah!" said Mordaunt. "That is another question."

"I shall tell her the next time I see her. Or, at least, I shall let her see that I know it."

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you," suggested Mordaunt. "It may give her an idea that you are jealous, and make no end of trouble. I say," he added, as a thought struck him, "you haven't been talking around this town, have you?"

He looked Clarkson straight in the eye, and the man cowered under his gaze.

"If the wife knows it all, what harm could it do?" said Clarkson, insinuatingly, though he seemed uneasy, for all that.

"Have you been talking to her?" demanded Mordaunt, in angry tones.

"No—no, not to her," stammered Clarkson. "Only to a relative—the old aunt, you know, Miss Burton.

"And you told her—what?"

"I am not obliged to answer you," retorted the man, reddening very much.

"You are, though," said Mordaunt, threateningly. "You may have made no end of trouble. That aunt is capable of doing anything to hurt Mr. Darrell, and she hates his wife on his account. She has been angry ever since he was married, and would get them divorced if she could. If you have stirred up things here," he added, angrily, "I will stir up enough for you somewhere else!"

Clarkson writhed under the scathing words.

"But if she knew it all before?" he said, again.

"Knew it all? Knew *what*? If she knows that he has a friend in Boston who shares his views on Socialism, or some other confounded rot, that is one thing; if you have started suspicions that there is infidelity to boot, that is quite another. I don't know, and I won't take your word for it, either. I am going to Mrs. Darrell—and Miss Burton—and find out. Yes, and after that I shall go to Miss Casson to tell her what you have done!" he continued, growing angrier as he proceeded. "You may have been up to other mischief, too. Mrs. Darrell is Miss Burton's natural heir. You may have made so much feeling with your confounded stories that she has had her will changed. What the dickens brought you here anyway? The best thing you can do is to go as fast as you can, and tell the old maid

you are a liar, and then get out of town on the first train!"

Clarkson was very much confused, but he tried to put on an air of dignity.

"I don't think you can make me leave town until I please," said he.

"I will tell you what," replied Mordaunt, turning upon him like a wolf, "if you are in Auburn at noon to-morrow, I will kick you out of it!"

Without replying, Clarkson turned abruptly away, and Mordaunt walked towards the wood path which he was in the habit of frequenting. He was a little ashamed of himself. He could not remember when he had ever been in such a temper before. He walked on until he was comparatively calm, and then, though it was Monday night, he bent his steps towards the Darrell residence. Before he reached there he believed he had succeeded in eradicating all traces of excitement from his face, but in this he was mistaken. Anna saw at first glance that something unusual had happened.

"You are not well to-night, Mr. Allen?" she said, sympathizingly.

"Oh, yes, I am well enough," he said, nervously, taking her hand and holding it, to her momentary consternation. "I have just had a talk with a scoundrel, and it has flustered me a little, that is all. But you must not call me 'Mr. Allen' again. My name is Mordaunt: Harold Allen Mordaunt."

"Mordaunt?" she repeated, tremblingly.

"Yes," he said, suddenly discovering that he was holding her hand, and releasing it. "That is my name. Your husband must have spoken of me to you."

She stared at him wildly.

"My husband ! You know him ?"

"I have known him for twenty years."

"Then explain why you came here under the name of Allen."

"Don't ask me too much to-night. I did it for his sake and yours. But the man I have just left has been telling falsehoods in the village—for his own purposes. He admitted to me that he has been talking to your Aunt Burton."

She uttered a little cry and sank into a chair.

"Falsehoods !" she cried, clasping her hands together. "Did you say falsehoods ?"

"Yes, falsehoods, insinuations, I don't know what. Anything but the truth. Has your aunt been here to poison your ears with them ? I suspected it. Let me urge you to disabuse your mind of all that she has said, without a minute's hesitation. The wretch from whom she obtained them is unworthy of the slightest credence."

He spoke very rapidly, and his words seemed to overcome her with joy.

"Why am I here ?" he asked as impetuously as before. "Because I love your husband, because I love your children, because I love you ! For I do love you, Anna Darrell, and yet I think not with more love than I have a right to give to the wife of my dearest friend. I love you, and I love Edmund, and my greatest wish is to see you as closely united as a husband and wife should be. I am not going to criticise him for what he has done or is doing—that would not be my right—but if there is a deeper possibility of love between you, I wish it might be yours. He is coming home in a week or two—I received a letter from him Saturday—and he ought

never to go so long from you again. As soon as he comes, I shall see him, I shall tell him—I—"

The violence of his emotion overcame him, and he pressed his hands over his face. When he looked up again, she was standing beside him.

"How could he leave a woman like you, and stay away month after month!" he exclaimed, seizing her hand once more. "You are worthy of any man who walks the earth!"

She trembled as he touched her.

"You are very kind," she responded, in a whisper. "I can never thank you enough for the interest you have taken in me."

He looked longingly into her face.

"I do not love you too much—no, I am sure I do not," he said, very slowly. "I should have left Auburn any time when I discovered that. You do not wish me to go?" he added.

"No; not from Auburn; but from the house at this time, yes. I am sure it would be better."

"But you have confidence in me?"

"Yes; oh, yes!"

He rose; walked to the door more firmly than usual; paused at the threshold; half turned back; and then passed swiftly down the walk and into the street.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT THE SPY DISCOVERED.

There is a proverb to the effect that the good-will, even of a dog, is preferable to his enmity. Miss Laura Casson had learned this lesson much better than had Harold Allen Mordaunt. It took her but a very little while to discover that George Clarkson could be a very disagreeable personage. When he first came to her house she was much attracted by the bright way in which he discussed social issues, and thanked Mrs. St. John warmly for bringing him to her attention. But when he precipitately fell in love with her, as she a little later diagnosed his complaint—when he ceased to say anything that had not in it some touch of irony—when he began to make hints about Darrell, to be surly at the least attention she paid to any other masculine guest, and to drop suggestions of a desire to see her in private, she was not long in changing her mind. She could have settled the matter by conveying to the obnoxious young man an intimation that his further presence at her receptions was not desirable; but the probability was that this would only transfer the field of his operations. She did not like him as an avowed friend; she was not likely to be better pleased if she converted him into a pronounced enemy.

Her intention, therefore, was to let matters take their own course, in the hopes that he would even-

tually see the folly of his conduct. He was not the first man who had been stricken with a severe attack of affection for her. She believed the affair would run its course and die at last of its own accord.

The sudden alteration in his manner, on the night following his first conference with Mordaunt, surprised Miss Casson greatly. The side which he presented her on that occasion was one which she had never seen. He complimented her on her looks, became specially attentive to several gentlemen with whom she found it necessary to confer at length, and was in general as much unlike the former Mr. Clarkson as one could possibly conceive. But though she was much puzzled by all this, it did not throw her off her guard. She knew well that something unusual must have happened to cause this stupendous change, and she bided her time to discover what it was. When more than a month had gone by, and his improved demeanor continued, she was obliged to admit to herself that she could make nothing of it. And then there came a day—the one following his stormy interview with Mordaunt, detailed in the last chapter—when he came boldly to her door in the middle of the afternoon, and sent up his card with the message that he wished to see her on a matter of importance.

Miss Casson's reception evenings were open, as has been stated, to the very widest circle of people of all shades of opinion, and of all grades of society. Her list of individual friends whom she saw on other occasions, was the smallest, perhaps, possessed by any lady in Boston. So generally was this understood, that few outside of her intimates ever called upon her, except by request, and those who did were almost invariably met with a "Not at home."

that polite fiction which has become almost a necessity to very busy or very retiring people. The servant took Mr. Clarkson's card and carried it with his statement to her mistress. There was a moment of indecision, and then Miss Casson directed that the gentleman should be shown into the drawing-room. She had thought it over very rapidly. He might be there on some errand that would prove disagreeable; he might, on the contrary, have something of importance to communicate. In either case, the wisest way was to see him, for if the former supposition proved correct, it would be easy to make this visit a final one.

So Miss Casson laid down the pen she was using, and went into the drawing-room to meet her visitor, who rose at her entrance, and bowed profoundly.

"I trust you will not think me impolite," she said, before he could speak, "if I tell you at the outset that I can only spare you a very few minutes. I am reading the proofs of my magazine, which appears this week. However, if your business is really of importance, I must defer my other work until I have listened to it."

She took a chair, motioning him to resume the one he had vacated, and assumed an attitude of attention which disconcerted him not a little. He did not fancy seeing things put on such a purely commercial basis.

"I came here, Miss Casson," he began, struggling to hide his confusion, "to say something to you that I believe is for your interest. I may be mistaken, but I think it is worth your while to hear me."

She had not the least idea what was coming, but she bowed, and uttered the brief answer—

"Proceed."

"It is in relation to Mr. Darrell," he said, thinking it wisest to fix her attention at once.

She changed color in spite of herself.

"I do not know," she responded, slowly, "how there can be anything in reference to that gentleman about which you could feel it necessary to speak to me."

He regarded her attentively as he replied :

"I have come here because I think you do *not* know—I may be mistaken, but I think so," he replied with deliberation. "In one sense, it is true, it is no affair of mine. In another, considering the regard I have for you—"

But she broke in upon him.

"To the point, if you please, Mr. Clarkson. If there is anything that you think necessary to tell me, I pray you to do so without delay. For I assure you again that my time to-day is precious."

"Well, in short," replied Clarkson, becoming exasperated, "I have discovered that Mr. Darrell is a married man. Yes," he continued, mistaking the expression of her countenance as she received the information, "he has a wife and children living in the village of Auburn, in the western part of this State."

He paused to mark the effect of this bomb-shell, and was disappointed. Miss Casson had quickly recovered her equanimity and was regarding him with an icy stare.

"Well, proceed," she said, again.

"Proceed!" he echoed. "Why, what more is there that needs to be said?"

"Then am I to understand that this is all?"

"Is it not enough?" he cried.

"What interest do you imagine this matter has to

me?" she asked, enunciating each word with perfect distinctness.

It was now his turn to stare.

"You—you are through with him, then?" he stammered.

"Explain yourself!" she demanded, sharply. "It strikes me that your last expression demands it."

The coldness of her manner accentuated his uneasiness.

"Why," he ejaculated, "I thought—everybody thinks—that Darrell and you were more than ordinary friends. I don't mean anything unpleasant, you know, but I supposed that there was an understanding—an engagement—or something of that kind. There have been rumors lately that he was married, but very few of your acquaintances believed them. They all said you would not treat him as you do—if—if he were, you know. And when I happened to find out for certain, why, I thought it my duty to tell you, as I couldn't help believing that you were being deceived."

She drew up her shoulders, and surveyed him with an expression of contempt.

"I fear you take me for some other woman," she said. "Do you know who I am? My name is Laura Casson!"

He felt like a pigmy standing before the face of the Colossus of Rhodes as she thus launched her personality at him.

"Did you think that Laura Casson chose her friends before finding out what they were? Did you imagine that you could come here and tell me anything new about a man whom I have known for years and years? I knew Edmund Darrell before he was married and I have known him ever since. I

could tell you the very birthdays of his children. Alice, the fifth of May; Ethel, the sixteenth of August. I am at a loss to know what put the idea into your head that you had made a great discovery!"

Then, recollecting that it was not advisable to anger him too much, she burst into a hearty laugh.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she said, more affably, "for I am sure you meant well. You could not possibly have a wrong motive in going to all this trouble. When were you in Auburn?"

"I left there this morning," he replied, sulkily. He liked being laughed at even less than the manner which had preceded it.

"Indeed!" she cried. "And how did you leave our friend Mordaunt?"

"Your friend, perhaps; not mine," he retorted. "And his name is Allen, if you please."

"It is the same thing," she replied, lightly. "Have you two fallen out? I thought you were very friendly."

As Clarkson could not very well explain the cause of his difference with Mordaunt, he thought it best to turn the course of the conversation.

"Darrell must be very good-natured to send a man like that over from Europe to entertain his wife," he sneered. "He has been there all summer for nothing else, going down to her house after sunset, and staying till midnight or longer." He did not care much for absolute truth when he had a story to tell about an enemy. "If the husband stays abroad much longer, there will be no need of his coming home at all."

Laura Casson had at last heard something that she wanted to know. She saw that Clarkson was a

cleverer observer than she had given him credit for being. He had learned, in some way, that Mordaunt was Darrell's friend. She wondered how much more he had learned, and adroitly adopted the plan of professing disbelief as the best method of persuading him to tell everything he knew.

"Mr. Darrell probably thinks that he knows both his wife and his friend," she said, pleasantly.

Clarkson shook his head with a grimace.

"Why should Allen go there only after dark if everything is as it should be?"

"I should say to avoid the tittle-tattle of Auburn gossips."

"And why do they ride out in secluded country roads in the afternoon, taking different ways to go and return, but meeting where they can be together for hours?"

Laura Casson was startled from her perfect equanimity by this statement.

"You do not mean to assert that that is true?" she said, quickly.

"Ah, but I do. I have followed them!"

"More than once?"

"Yes, several times."

She was silent for some seconds. His exultation at being able to reveal something that she had not previously known was plainly visible. A great tumult was going on in her mind.

"Let me understand you plainly, Mr. Clarkson," she said, presently, "for this is a serious business. Do you say that Mr. Mordaunt and Mrs. Darrell are in the habit of meeting in out-of-the-way places, by apparent appointment?"

"I do!" he replied, boldly.

Entirely alone?"

His face fell a little at the question.

"Oh, she has the children with her, of course. But what of that? They are too young to understand what is said."

She had all she could do to conceal her disappointment at the answer.

"The children! That puts quite a different aspect on the case. Now," she leaned towards him and smiled approvingly, "just what have you seen? Don't be afraid. I want to know."

He was so pleased at being asked for his confidence that he never saw the trap into which he was falling. But it was not easy to look her in the eye and invent falsehoods.

"Why, there was nothing very terrible—aside from the fact of the meetings themselves. That did not look like mere friendship for the absent husband, you know. They just met in the road and rested their horses."

"Did you hear their conversation?"

"No, I could not get near enough for that."

"The children stayed with their mother?"

"They usually got out to pick flowers in the field near by."

"But they were always in sight?"

"Oh, yes."

"And their mother talked with Mr. Mordaunt, she in her carriage, and he in his?"

Clarkson assented.

"And that was all?"

"Yes."

Laura Casson leaned forward, and laid one of her hands on Clarkson's. As he, in his great surprise, looked up, he saw that her dark eyes darted flames.

"You are a bad witness," she said, insinuatingly.

"I am afraid something is the matter with your vision."

He stared at her blankly.

"Is it reasonable," she went on rapidly, "that a wife would drive, day after day, to meet a gentleman merely to talk to him—a wife, let us say, whose husband is absent in Europe, and who has never seen him six times a year since her marriage? Would she not have offered her cheek, if not her lips, and would not her companion have accepted the challenge? How can one conceive of a man like that spending a whole summer in the ridiculous way you suggest? Mr. Clarkson, you do not like to tell me the whole story."

He protested that she was in error, adding that he only regretted that it was not so, as he had reason to wish no good to Allen.

"No, you are wrong; you are forgetful," she replied, still with the basilisk eyes fixed on him. "You must try and think if you cannot recollect better. I advise you to visit some town near Auburn, where Mordaunt, or Allen, or whatever name he goes by, will not suspect your proximity, and there watch again. And the next time you must write down your observations—taking care that you miss nothing. Your memory is treacherous."

He could not fail to understand her. She had almost told him in so many words that he must perjure himself at her call. It did not startle him as much as he could have expected, but it did arouse an idea that had lain dormant for some minutes. If Miss Casson asked such a favor as this of him, he might make it the basis of a claim in return.

"I cannot conceive of any request of yours that I should refuse," he said, meaningly. "I would ask

nothing better than to be your slave for life. You cannot be oblivious to the feelings with which you have long inspired me."

Her brain was on fire. She hardly seemed to hear him.

"If you waste no time," she said, "you will get the evening train without difficulty to—let me see—to Brixton. That is only five miles from Auburn, and a good point from which to make observations." She rose from her chair, as if to hasten his departure. "Would you like to write to me?" she added.

"Above all things."

"You may do so."

"And when may I see you?"

"When your eyesight has sufficiently improved! When you have something worth coming to tell!"

He looked at her with hungry eyes.

"And my reward?" he faltered.

She started slightly.

"It is no time to talk of rewards! If you discover anything that leads to a reasonable suspicion, your duty will be plain. You have no time to lose. Go!"

CHAPTER XL

"YOU HAVE CHILDREN, ALSO."

He caught her hand quickly, and kissed it. Then, with a hasty good-bye, he left the house.

The minute that he was out of sight, Miss Casson's manner changed. She held from her the hand his lips had touched as if it were an unclean thing. Her eyelids drooped, and her rigid frame relaxed. The strength she had suddenly summoned seemed to leave her. Rising wearily, she tottered to her chamber, where she washed away the physical taint of contact with this man whom she loathed, But even as the soap and water covered the place, it came vividly across her mind how impossible it would be to wash the dark spots from her mind and conscience. For Laura Casson had a conscience, one that burned and pricked her mercilessly whenever she violated its injunctions, and at this moment it rang a clamor in her ears which seemed as if it would deafen her forever.

When the hand was to all outward appearance clean again, she returned to the drawing-room, and dropping into an easy chair, tried to think. Why had she sent Clarkson on that wicked mission? Why had she stooped to make use of such a tool, when the result must inevitably be to place her under obligations, entailing no end of annoyance? She heartily wished, as she sat there, that she had not been so indiscreet. There had not been time enough to consider. The opportunity had come so

suddenly that she could not resist the temptation. She could write to him, or telegraph him, even now, at Brixton, bidding him do nothing about it, but—what then?

If Darrell could only be persuaded to seek a separation from his wife by some means involving less danger!

She turned to her mantel, on which was his photograph, and taking up the portrait she pressed it to her lips.

"Oh, Edmund, my love!" she cried in spirit, "why have the fates divided us so cruelly! Bound by your own rash folly to a woman who is not your equal, held in chains by a fancy that your duty lies in that direction, is there no help for you, is there no help for me? Must I descend to the littlenesses of ordinary women in the mad hope to gain you! How much longer can I live in this Inferno, beseeching vainly for the drop of water that should cool my tongue?"

She was aroused from this revery by the maid, who came to say that the printer's boy wished to know if the proofs were ready. Perhaps it was well that the necessity of labor compelled her to forget for the moment her troubles. She plunged at once into her work, and was soon making alterations and corrections with as firm a hand as ever. It was a brilliant number of the magazine that she issued that month. Everybody said that Miss Casson had a right to be proud of it.

At nine o'clock that night, when the last of the proofs were finished, and after she had eaten an apology for a dinner—her appetite not being improved by the events of the afternoon—she went again into her drawing-room and sat there alone

with her head buried in her hands. Never had she felt so lonely ; never had life seemed so little worth the living. But when her spirits were at their lowest ebb she was roused by two quick strokes at the street gong.

The skilled telegraphist knows the touch of a brother operator, and can detect it years after in an unexpected part of the country. Laura Casson knew that only one man could have rung that bell. Though she had supposed him four thousand miles away, there was no doubt that Edmund Darrell was at her door.

The color that had deserted her face rushed back over it. Her lustreless eyes brightened, her white lips grew red, her thin nostrils dilated. She sprang up and took several steps toward the door, and then, recollecting something with a suddenness that was very like a shock, paused, set her teeth together, and walked slowly back to her chair. Hardly was she again seated when the cause of her emotion threw open the door of the room, and with rapid strides stood before her.

"Laura!"

All his joy at being with her again after six months of absence—all the realization of his hopes long deferred—were in that one word.

She held out her hand—not the one that Clarkson had kissed—and coolly asked him to be seated. His astonishment at her manner was plainly evident. He hesitated several seconds in sheer amazement, staring at her in the vain expectation of learning the reason for his strange reception. But pride came to his rescue, and he somewhat haughtily took the chair she indicated.

"I did not expect you so soon," she said, pre-

ferring not to let him guide the conversation. How did it happen?"

He could not understand her coldness, but he would have died rather than have told how much it affected him.

"I found that I could catch a faster steamer at Southampton," he replied, "and so I did not go to Liverpool. It made a difference of three days, and I wanted to get home as soon as possible."

"Yes, it must seem a long time, six months," she said. And he responded that it did; and thus they went on, for the next half hour, talking of little things, each well aware that there was no heart in either questions or answers. He told her that he had filed his applications for patents in all the countries in Europe, and that the business promised well. He had, in fact, received one very handsome offer for rights, to take effect as soon as the patents were allowed. He talked of Paris and Berlin and London and Vienna. And as he went on with his details, he knew that she cared nothing about it all.

At last he decided that he might as well know now as later what had so altered her manner towards him, and at a pause in the conversation he asked, abruptly—

"Well, Laura, what is it?"

She glanced up.

"What is what?"

"The cause of my peculiar reception. I want to know. I have a right to know. Tell me."

"Your reception is as cordial as I have given to any gentleman since you left. I—"

"Wait!" he interrupted. "I am not asking for much, considering all that has passed between us."

She broke in upon him then.

“ ‘Considering all that has passed ! What has ever passed between us to give you the right to count yourself on a different footing here from other men ?’ ”

He was incredulous of his own powers of hearing as he digested her words.

“ I have come here as your friend for more than eight years,” he said, quietly. “ You have never treated me as you have to-night, and you know it well. You have written me letters within the last three weeks, and none of them in the vein you now adopt. I am not complaining. I am not saying that you are wrong now, or that you were right then. But I think I have a right to ask the cause of the change.”

His calmness, which she could not help feeling was greater than her own, was unanticipated, and the programme which she had laid out was not easy to continue.

“ If there has ever been between you and me a cordiality greater than that which has existed between myself and others,” she said, in a voice not perfectly firm, “ there are reasons why it should end. Hereafter it is better, it is wiser, for us to assume towards each other only the ordinary friendliness of business partners. Do you not think so, yourself ? ”

She hoped he would answer that he did not, but he merely acquiesced.

“ That point is for you to decide,” he replied, “ and yet I feel none the less justified in asking you what has led you to this decision.”

She was silent for a full minute, although she twice made an attempt to speak. Then she said, in a firm voice—

“ You have a wife.”

"Very true," he replied, and a shadow crossed his face. "But that you knew before."

Laura Casson had calculated neither the strength of this man nor her own weakness. As she uttered the next sentence, she raised an agonized face to his.

"You have—*children*—also."

He understood it in a moment. She had learned this in his absence.

"You have deceived me!" she went on, passionately, throwing down all reserve. "I remember well all that you said that day you came to me—after—after Professor Marlin died. You were married then. That neither of us could help. You believed it your duty to support the girl you had wedded in your folly. That I did not object to; though I thought it then better, both for her and you, that you seek an early separation. On that day we made an agreement—you and I. I was never to think of marriage, and you were to be a husband in name only. Ah! how well I remember! The stipulations were every one your own. You said you loved me; that you had never for one moment ceased to love me; and I said that I would take you at your word. I told you that I would accept no attentions from any man, but would wait—though it might be until my hair was white, or until the grave closed over me—for you. I have kept my word, Edmund Darrell. I thought I was dealing with a man who was above his fellows. I have loved you as no inferior woman could, without doing in all that time a single act that could lower me either in your estimation or my own. But *you*,"—she paused, her lips trembling—"you—"

It was impossible to complete the sentence, and, as she gave up trying, her frame shook with sobs

Darrell waited until she grew calmer, and then proceeded :

“Laura, there has evidently been a misunderstanding between us. And this is not so strange when we consider how this agreement—as you call it—was brought about. I came to you, at the time you refer to, I admit, in a state of excitement. I had committed the greatest error of which a man can be guilty, and the fact that I found you still free added enormously to the effect of my action. I knew that I had married one woman when every throb of my heart was for another. You told me then that your love for me was as strong as mine for you. There were three of us to be punished for the sins I alone had committed. If I could have borne all the pain, most gladly would I have done it. But that could not be. The girl I had married had a heart that might also be broken. Yes, Laura, and it is not becoming in you to sneer at that statement. Uneducated country girl that she was and is, she, too, loved me. The children have reconciled her to my almost perpetual absence. They have smoothed the way for her, for me, and—let me say it—for you. Do you not see how? She had the children, and you had me. I have hardly been a month at my home, counting the minutes and adding them together, in all the years since my marriage. Every hour that I could spare from business has been yours. How could I, in common decency, have done more?”

She held her throbbing temples with her hot hands, and when she spoke the bitterness was gone from the pleading tones.

“Oh, you cannot understand!” she said, in a choking voice. “How could you, being a man,

know what a woman like me can suffer ! In all these years, while I have kept this ivory exterior, the rack of pain has torn me day by day. You have been here, it is true. I have heard your voice, have clasped your hand, have looked into your eyes. But how could I forget, even for one instant, that you were not mine ! You went to Auburn—I knew that—and it almost killed me to know it. But I did not know, I did not suspect, I did not dream, that you lavished on her the caresses that were denied to me !

"You expressly told me—" he interrupted.

"That I did not want them ? Yes, and it was true. I did not wish your kisses, Edmund, but I did not wish them given to another. I would not have accepted them—never at any moment since you told me of your marriage. A caress from you would be only a mockery while the law held you in another bond."

"And so my children—poor little things!—must come between you and me," he said, gently, for he could not help seeing how she suffered. "They are to separate us—is that it, Laura ?"

"Not as far as the Cause is concerned," she replied, striving to master her emotions. "But I never can feel, as I have felt, that you were as much mine as hers. I must stifle this terrible love that has shown its power to give me such vital pain. We will work together still, but that is all."

He shook his head with decision.

"I could not do that," he said. "I already feel most uncomfortable here. I never could forget what has been. No," he added, reflectively, "we must give it all up. We must never see each other. There is no middle course."

She wondered if he meant it—if he really could

give up seeing her—and she knew that if he did it would be her death blow. The fury of her passion had passed, and she felt it time to temporize.

“Edmund,” she said, tenderly, “could you give up all our relations as easily as that? Is there no deeper sentiment in your breast, after the professions of these long years?”

“But what can I do,” he asked, helplessly, “if you cannot forgive my poor babies for coming into the world? The younger of the two is nearly four years old. And my wife, who has seen me only five or six times in the last two years, how can I treat her any worse than I have? She has never uttered a word of complaint, never a hint of discontent, and yet I presume she has feelings like other people. As long as she is true to me, I *must* recognize the law's relation.”

Miss Casson caught her breath.

“And you do not question—of course you do not—that she *is* true?”

He smiled with the confidence of one who could afford to laugh at a suggestion like that.

“It is beyond all doubt,” he replied. “She is innocence itself.”

“And if you should find yourself mistaken?”

He looked up sharply.

“If she were criminal? Why, in that case, there is only one course open to a man of honor.”

He had said all she wished him to say, and she managed to turn the talk towards the topic of Socialism, where they could meet on common ground. It was late when he left, and she succeeded in exacting a promise from him to call again soon, for the purpose of discussing an article that had been submitted for the next magazine. It was with

great joy that she heard his acceptance of the proposition. Now that she had spent the force of her storm, she could not bear to think of its possible effects.

Darrell came the next day, and the next, and so two weeks went by. He found time to attend to his business, and to go to Miss Casson's receptions, and to see her in private ; but he did not find time to visit his wife and children.

And all the while a mysterious man, who boarded with a farmer in Brixton, continued to haunt the wood and roads of Auburn and the neighborhood of the Darrell house.

CHAPTER XII.

HAUNTING THE RAILWAY STATION.

Mehitable Burton had had her way. Her brother Ephraim, pliant tool that he was in her hands, had signed the new will ; Anna Darrell's name was not mentioned in it. A lot of foreign missionary societies, Seaman's Bethels and Orphan Asylums were to get the dollars that he had contrived to make and she to save, after their dust had been gathered to that of their fathers.

Though both the Burtons were attendants at Divine worship, neither of them had any conception whatever of real religion. They went to church, just as they paid their taxes, because it was considered a necessary and proper thing to do in the community in which they lived. They probably had a dim

idea that pew rent receipts, filed away for nearly half a century, would constitute a sort of preferred claim on everlasting salvation ; a kind of insurance against fire in the next life, as a policy in the *Ætna* or the State company was in this.

Miss Burton had picked out the societies that were to benefit by her brother's decease from a miscellaneous assortment which Lawyer Jacobs procured at her request. None of them were to touch the money during her lifetime, should she survive Ephraim. It was easier to select her beneficiaries than one might think, for the main point was not so much to decide who should have the money as to make sure that the Darrells never got any of it. Her bitterness against her niece had been much increased by her persistent determination to await the return of her husband and to hear his side of the story before taking for granted all that her aunt told her.

"As long as we had only suspicions," the old lady had said darkly, "I could forgive your foolish infatuation with a man who has been away from you almost every hour since you married him. I have brought you proofs that should satisfy any reasonable woman. If they are not sufficient for you, you need only to make a visit to Boston and find out for yourself."

"He is my children's father," Anna had answered, tearfully, "I must wait until he comes before I can decide."

"Yes, and let him smooth everything over with his soft tongue !" was the waspish reply.

"Edmund will not lie to me. If he has done wrong he will admit it when I ask him the direct question."

"Bah !" exclaimed Aunt Burton, unable to con-

trol herself longer. "If that is your final decision, you and I are done forever. All that Ephraim has made was left to you years ago by his will, but I will have it altered this very day. Our money shall never go to the wife or children of a man like that, while they cling to him with such obstinacy. Do you hear? You will never get a penny from us!"

So the new will was made, and all Auburn knew it before twenty-four hours, as they knew almost everything else that should have been kept secret.

Anna thought little and cared little about it. She had never been in want of money enough for her moderate needs, and Aunt Burton's threat had for her very little significance. What she did think of—night and day—was her husband, for whom she had developed a more absorbing passion than ever, since these charges were brought against him. She could not deny that his conduct had been most peculiar; that he absented himself for very long periods, and wrote seldom and briefly. But she had always accepted his explanations that business affairs were pressing, and that his time was taken up with things of moment which he could not well neglect. There had been times when she had doubted whether he loved her as much as a man should love his wife, but it was incredible that another woman had been given the affection that she had been denied. Still, the circumstantial story that her aunt had brought, determined her to learn the truth, at whatever cost. If Edmund had been guilty, she would leave him; but first this must be proved beyond peradventure, either by his own confession or other positive evidence.

At this period she had only two sources of consolation. One was her children; the other was Harold

Mordaunt. The little girls were growing prettier and more intelligent every day. She felt the greatest pride in them, though it was now mingled with a sort of terror as she thought of a possible future when she should have to tell them that their father had been a wicked man, from whom she had to flee. Ethel looked remarkably like him, and Alice, though she had her mother's dark eyes and hair, bore an unmistakeable resemblance to the Darrells. The elder child, with a perception far beyond her years, was quick to notice the melancholy that had come over her mother, and to extend her sympathies.

"Why is it that you never smile any more, mamma?" she said. "Is it because papa does not come?"

"Hush, child, hush!" answered the mother, frightened that such a thought should find lodgment in the little brain.

Alice wound her arms around her mother's neck, and kissed her gently.

"I dreamed of him last night, mamma. He was on a big ship, and coming right towards me. And when he came near, I waved my handkerchief, and cried out to him; but he did not see me, and his ship went sailing on. But dreams do not mean anything, for I dreamed once that I was dead and lying in a casket, and when I awoke you were bending over and kissing me."

Ethel said very little about anything. She kept to her amusements all day long, being as well satisfied when she was alone as when she had a companion. If Alice talked to her about their papa, she would shake her head carelessly.

"No, me doesn't know any papa," she would say. "Me never seen 'im."

Mordaunt came nearly every day, for since Clark-

son had left town, he saw no need for special secrecy. His sympathy for Mrs. Darrell continued to increase as he noticed the sadness which now marked her every mood and expression. At times he felt so incensed against her husband that he could have throttled him with a good will; and, again, he hardly knew which of them to pity most. At these latter times, he used to feel that his friend was comparable to a traveler who languishes upon a desert, when an oasis that is his by right lies within a hundred paces. He had seen enough of Darrell to know that he was far from being a happy man. Much of his sadness Mordaunt laid to what he called his "pestilential doctrines," but he thought a wife like Anna ought to be able to bring light into the face of any man, even a rank Anarchist. Bachelor as he was, it seemed to him little less than a crime to cast aside the love of such a woman, and he felt that the effect must fall heavily upon the head of the offender.

Mordaunt's position was a very strange one. There was so much that he wanted to do, and so little that he could accomplish. He had come there at first from motives of mere curiosity, and the course that he afterwards adopted grew upon him unawares. The change in all the habits of a lifetime astonished but did not dismay him. He believed, in the first place, that Darrell was not wilfully misled. He believed all that Laura Casson had told him of the purity of their relations, and he felt that there was no such chasm to bridge as if the opposite had been true. If he could show Edmund the full value of the treasure he had neglected, there was great reason to hope that he would assume the right position at last.

He used to picture to himself the united family, the happy wife, the fond husband and father. And at such times he used to wonder why his own heart grew sick within him, and why he felt like fleeing from the place where all this good result had grown from his unselfish efforts.

Darrell wrote to Mordaunt quite frequently—twice a month, at least,—certainly much oftener than he did to his wife. Mordaunt's answers were all mailed from New York, where he sent them to his bankers, and dealt solely with the ordinary affairs of the day. When a letter came to him, dated at Boston, and stating that Darrel had already arrived in America, he was somewhat surprised, as he had not expected him quite so soon. It made him a little nervous, too, as he reflected that the denouement must now be very near.

He was glad Edmund was in the country—of course he was—for had he not been hoping all the summer for his speedy return? The sooner he reached Auburn the sooner the work of reconciliation could be begun. But something was the matter with the peacemaker. He grew paler, and neglected his meals, and he began to haunt the neighborhood of the railroad station.

There was one train from the east that stopped at Auburn at about ten o'clock in the morning, and another at about eight at night. All the other trains from that direction dashed contemptuously by the little village as if they had something of more importance to attend to than its insignificant interests. Mordaunt went regularly to each of these trains, thinking it best to welcome his friend at the threshold of the town. He paced the platform sometimes half an hour before the train was due according to

the printed schedule posted on the walls of the waiting room. He heard the rumbling of the carriages in the distance; the shrill scream of the locomotive a mile away; the roar of the approaching mass; the hissing of the steam. At night he saw the huge light come bearing down upon him like an avenging demon. There was nearly always somebody who alighted. The mail bag was thrown off, a trunk or two, and a few express parcels. The conductor cried, "All aboard!" The wheels again revolved, and the long serpent vanished around the bend.

He went to the station for days and days, and saw this repeated like a dream that comes and goes and never changes. He saw this always, but there was never any Edmund Darrell.

As the long time went by, he grew bitter again. Edmund was at Boston, five hours or so away from his wife, after months of absence, and did not think it worth his while to pay her even a brief visit. It was even worse than this, for Anna showed, in response to his hints, that she believed her husband still in Europe, and had no intimation of the date when he might be expected. It was growing outrageous. It was becoming unbearable.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND.

One day, in one of his walks about the town, he met Miss Burton. He knew her well enough to bow to her, after the Auburn fashion, which recognized all reputable people after the third street meeting, but

he had never spoken to her, nor she to him. This time, however, she halted in the path, and fixed her dark eyes upon him, looking, as she leaned on her heavy cane, like some old sorceress about to weave a spell over an unlucky traveler.

"Stop a minute, young man," she said, in tones very like a command. "I wish to speak to you."

He paused, not displeased at the occurrence, for he thought she might have something to say worth his hearing. He knew that she was Mrs. Darrell's aunt, and Landlord Upham, of the Auburn House, had told him of the prevailing rumor concerning the new will.

"You are a friend of Edmund Darrell," she said, in a grating voice.

"I know Mr. Darrell," was his reply.

"And you know his wife, my niece."

"Slightly. Not as well as I do her husband," he added, with a vague idea that it was better to tell her that before she proceeded much farther.

She peered into his face in a crone-like way.

"Did he send you to Auburn?"

"He? Send me here! Certainly not!"

"Why does he not come home?"

Very, very black were her eyes at that moment, and he did not know what to say.

"I know it is not his habit to make long calls when he comes," she went on, sarcastically. "The most he has done in the last three years is to arrive on the morning train and leave at night. But it is more than six months since he was here last, and he not only does not come but he does not write. You are his friend, and you probably know his reasons."

Mordaunt regarded the old woman with some

degree of curiosity. He could not get angry with her, as he felt he ought.

"If I knew anything about Mr. Darrell's affairs, I certainly should not reveal them to you," he said. "You are not, I fear, any too friendly in your feelings towards him."

Miss Burton struck her cane savagely upon the ground.

"Ought I to be friendly with him?" she cried. "Has he acted in a way to deserve my friendship, do you think? He came here and took from my house a girl who was to all intents my daughter, almost without so much as asking if he might. He married her when she was only eighteen, a mere child, who could not have known her mind. And then"—the old lady choked between her wrath and her sorrow—"and then he left her within a week, and she has hardly seen him enough since to know whether she has a husband or not! I suppose you think I ought to be very fond of that man, and to love my niece better, because she preferred him to her kith and kin, who took her when a child and would have left her all they had as if she were their own! You are his friend and you can speak for him. Is he justified in going away for the better part of a year, and then returning to America without even sending her a letter to say he is here?"

She knew that, too, did she?

"I am not the keeper of Mr. Darrell's conscience," he replied, evasively.

"His conscience!" she retorted. "You would have a fine time finding it, I think! He arrived in Boston three weeks ago. I know, you see. Now, is he coming here again, or was his last call a final one? His wife knows all about his conduct. She has the

very name and address of the woman for whom he deserts her."

Then Mordaunt thought he ought to interfere.

"I know the lady to whom you refer," he said "and I think you misjudge her. She and Mr. Darrell edit a magazine together. I am confident that their connection goes no further."

Miss Burton's eyes flashed again.

"Tell that to some one besides me!" she exclaimed, with venom. "Tell it to his wife. Probably that is what you are here for. You can make her believe the moon is made of green cheese, but you can't stuff such nonsense into a hard old head like mine."

She shook the hard old head until the black bonnet threatened to fall off.

"I have given my niece every chance," she continued, after a pause. "If she prefers the sort of life she is living—and the sure result that must follow—to her father's sister and brother, very well. It is an old and true saying that he who makes the bed must lie in it. When the time comes that he leaves her entirely, and she is penniless and comes to me for help, I won't even give her a crust! No, I will stand and let her starve! She makes the choice with her eyes open!"

Mordaunt flushed a little.

"Mrs. Darrell will never come to you as a beggar," he said, straightening himself up.

"What *will* she do," demanded Miss Burton, "when she is left with her two children to support?"

He lowered his voice. •

"If the time ever comes, Miss Burton, as God grant it never may, when your niece needs pecuniary aid, I shall make it my duty and pleasure to relieve

her. I have a large fortune, for which I have had as yet but little use. It will be open to her at such a time."

The spinster surveyed the author of this statement with more interest than before. Her gaze wandered over his form from toe to crown.

"Be care-ful!" she said, warningly. "You are on ve-ry dan-ger-ous ground."

"How is it dangerous?"

"Your words betray you, sir," she replied.

"I do not understand."

"Then it is time you did. Do you think, in the event you speak of, that you could retain the friendship of Mr. Darrell? If he knew you gave money to his wife it would shiver his good feelings towards you as a hammer would shiver glass."

"After he had entirely deserted and failed to supply her with necessities?" asked Mordaunt.

"Yes."

"In such a case I should not be long in making my choice," said he. "I should have to sacrifice my friendship, and think only of my duty."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Burton. "Why should you have a duty to perform towards the deserted wife of Edmund Darrell, more than towards any other necessitous woman? Look out for yourself, young man! Your feet are on ground that is very dangerous."

He felt the force of what she said, and hesitated before replying. Then her voice took on a kinder tone.

"There is something in your face that I like; I am inclined to judge you differently from any man I know. But let me tell you candidly what I should think of anyone else in your place. I should believe

that he was standing by the tree ready to catch the fruit, when the bough fell beneath the repeated blows of the man whose duty it was to preserve it."

He was betrayed into giving her more of his confidence that he had intended.

"Heaven knows I would do anything to prevent the severing of that bough!" he exclaimed.

"I believe you," she replied. "And for this reason I tell you still that you are standing on a volcano. No man ever successfully arranged a difficulty between a husband and wife, without being himself a sufferer. You cannot unite these mill-stones, but if you could you would be ground to pieces between them."

"I am not afraid," he responded, earnestly.

Miss Burton searched his face again with her restless eyes.

"I tell you, as a friend, you have stayed too long in Auburn," she said. "You can do no good here, and you may do much harm."

"How can I do harm, and to whom?"

"To yourself, at least. To your friend's wife, possibly."

"I can hardly think that your interest in her welfare is genuine," he answered, growing suddenly red, "after what I have heard you say to-day. It seems to me likely that Mrs. Darrell may need a friend, and I am sure she will never find a truer one than I."

Miss Burton listened with more patience than could have been expected.

"But you ought to know," she replied, "that no man can show such friendship, as you call it, to a woman whose relations with her husband are at fault, without doing more injury than he can ever

repair. I am out of patience with my niece, it is true, but I should not like to see a worse thing happen to her than she has suffered already. You understand. I do not wish her good name compromised."

He cried out in pain, as if she had pierced his heart with a knife.

"Miss Burton—"

"Not so fast," she exclaimed, interrupting him. "I do not mean that I should have any doubt of my niece's honor under any circumstances. I think I know her well enough for that. But the clamor of public gossip no one can stop. You can never convince the world that it is an innocent proceeding to take the side of a woman in conflict with her husband, or to give her aid after she has separated from him."

"What must I do, then?" he demanded, growing desperate, for she seemed to be weaving a net around him.

She struck her stick again with a characteristic motion upon the walk.

"Leave Auburn ; go on your travels. Cease meddling with what you cannot help."

"If I were her brother—" he began, retrospectively.

"But you are not ! There is no position in the affair that can be explained if tongues begin to wag."

He thought it over for a minute, and then returned to the argument.

"There is force in what you say, Miss Burton, but it would have more weight with me if it came from some other source. Just consider the case as it presents itself to my mind. You are so angry with your niece for continuing to live as Mr. Darrell's wife

that you openly declare all relations over between you. Common rumor says that you have already altered your will so as to cut her off with nothing. You have told me that you would let her starve in case he deserted her, if she applied to you for aid, and she seems to have no other near relations to help her. And you have done more than this. You have caused her to suspect her husband's fealty, and have done your best to precipitate a collision whenever he comes home. Now, I have no selfish motive in whatever I may do. I have no hatreds to foster, no spites to carry to the bitter end. Both Mr. and Mrs. Darrell are my esteemed friends. If they become happily united, my mission will be finished. If worse comes to worse, and either of them—either of them, Miss Burton—need my assistance, they shall have it."

"I have given you sensible advice," she answered. "You must be your own judge about following it. A man may smoke a cigar in a powder magazine for months without doing any harm, but if a spark does touch the powder it is then too late for repentance."

With these words she turned abruptly and left him there. He walked slowly back to his hotel, pondering upon her strange warning, and trying to weigh the pros and cons of her suggestions. He had known for a long time that there was something unusual in the way he regarded the Darrell affair. Now the matter was presented to him as it appeared to an on-looker, not unprejudiced in judgment, to be sure, but capable of forming an opinion, and knowing what others might do and think. Above all things, he would not wish to cause suspicion to rest on Mrs. Darrell, and he realized that there was truth in the prognostications that he had just heard.

If he remained much longer, he might do her much more harm than he could possibly do good. He began to stare the idea of departure in the face ; and when he comprehended how much it meant to him to leave Auburn, and how little he cared for the rest of the world, his spirits sank very low.

He went as usual at eight o'clock to the station, and he saw as usual the train arrive and depart without the object of his search. He would have been greatly surprised had it been otherwise, for he had quite given up expecting to see him. When the train rolled off, he walked over to Mrs. Darrell's, resolved to tell that he was going.

She received him, as she always did now, with a sad smile of welcome, and he saw that she had recently been weeping. He dared not ask what caused those tears. He led the conversation into ordinary topics for a few minutes, in hopes to see her countenance brighten, but in vain. At last, despairing of reaching the point by circumlocution, he came to it directly.

"I do not know as you will see me again very soon after to-night," he said. "I think I shall be obliged to go away to-morrow."

"I am sorry," she responded, with a nervous start. "I wish you could stay a little longer. I expect my—my husband—very soon."

"He has written?" said Mordaunt, incautiously.

Another tremor passed through her.

"No," she answered, never thinking of equivocation. "But Mr. Barker, the grocer, told me that he saw him in Boston yesterday. Edmund said he had been very busy since his arrival, but that he should come as soon as possible. You—you have not heard?"

He was ashamed to lie to those honest eyes.

"Yes, I have heard," he admitted, "but I did not know how to tell you. I do not know how to tell you anything," he proceeded, his voice shaking. "I have wanted to help you, and I have not known what to do. And—I am going—away."

She struggled to command herself and succeeded, though it was a sore task.

"How long has he been in the country?" she asked.

"Three weeks," he answered, guiltily.

"And at Boston all the time?"

"I think so."

His eyes could not leave the carpet. His face was on fire.

"Mr. Mordaunt," she said, bravely, "you told me a few weeks ago that the stories about my husband were, to the best of your belief, untrue. Do you still say that?"

He bowed a mute assent.

"Then why—why, I ask—has he stayed three weeks in Boston, without even sending word to me that he had left Europe? I ask you as his friend, what explanation he can make?"

Mordaunt felt his head swimming.

"I do not know—I cannot tell you," he stammered. "I believe him guiltless of crime, but I cannot account for his actions. You ought not to ask me these questions, and I ought not to answer you."

She had an exterior of wonderful coolness as she heard and spoke.

"Excuse me. I have no knowledge of the ways of the world. I have only lived in Auburn. I do not know how much I ought to confide in you; but this I will say, he must explain everything to me.

or I will never consent to go on bearing the name of wife to him."

"Hush!" he said, pleadingly. "Do not say these things. I am going. Here is my card, with an address where mail will always reach me. If you ever need me—understand, *need* me—write, and I will respond. Do not think I want to go, but it has become my imperative duty. I shall think of you every hour. If I ever utter a prayer it will be for you. When the right time comes you will see me again. But now—I must go."

She buried her face in her hands, and did not look up as he left the room. All the light seemed to have faded out of her life.

Mordaunt opened the gate with a shaking hand, and heard it latch with its sharp click behind him. Before he had taken twenty steps he met a man who barred his progress.

"Stop, Harold Mordaunt," said the man. "I have a word to say to you."

It was Edmund Darrell.

CHAPTER XIV.

STUNG TO MADNESS.

Society has thrown such bars and gates around the possession of that species of personal property known as women, that every poacher on domestic preserves should know well the perils he may encounter. Buckshot will do for a chicken thief, but bullets are supposed to be the correct thing for a seducer.

Though thoroughly conscious of the rectitude of his purpose in all that he had done, Harold Mordaunt felt a chill similar to that which the muzzle of a revolver imparts to the neck, when he heard his name called in that strange manner, and recognized the voice as that of the man whose wife he had just left. He knew that the color had forsaken his cheek, but he resolved to put on the best front he could.

"Ah, Edmund, is it you?" he said, holding out his hand.

Darrell did not offer to accept the welcome. He had a constrained look, as could plainly be seen in the fairly clear atmosphere of the evening. For three or four seconds Mordaunt studied the face before him, and at the end of that time he knew that a physical encounter at least was not one of the things to be feared. But what to call the sentiment that gave the peculiar appearance to his friend's face he could not tell.

"I have offered you my hand, Edmund," he said, at last, "and you have refused it. As I have done nothing to deserve this, I ask for the reason."

When Darrell replied, his voice and manner were those of a person who wishes to hasten the business before him. He spoke quietly—almost unintelligibly at times—and his gaze was fixed alternately on the ground, on the adjacent trees, and on the sky; everywhere, in fact, except upon his companion.

"You ask an explanation," he began. "Well, I do not intend to give one, for I consider it a superfluity. I know how you have passed the summer. You have not acted the part of a friend, and the best way is to cease pretending to be one. Still I am not here to find as much fault as you might think natural. I do feel outraged—you can well believe that—but

perhaps I am also a little to blame. You knew my secret. You knew that I had a wife who was very young, quite inexperienced, and whom I undoubtedly neglected. You had seen her photograph, which showed that she was comely. I presume it was an opportunity that you could not resist."

Harold Mordaunt bit his lips until the blood came. He folded his arms and looked at the speaker without a word. Then Darrell proceeded.

"Some men would say—most men, in fact—that I ought to kill you. I do not care for their opinion. I have ethics and standards of my own. When I heard of this I had a good while to think it over, and I found that there were two men who must be tried together. I was one of the two. The guilt began with me, years ago, when I married this girl without loving her, and it has grown ever since through my constant neglect. I said to myself, 'This Harry Mordaunt is a pleasureseeker. He has no serious business in life. The course he has taken is the one that ought to have been expected. It was outrageous, surely, to select the home of his bosom friend for spoliation, but many another idler has given him a precedent. I left my fold unprotected. If some wolf has entered I ought rather to blame my own credulity than to curse the conduct of a creature that has, after all, merely acted out its nature. So I came down here to-night, not to assault you, not even to say ugly things, but to ask you what you propose to do, that there may be no misunderstanding hereafter.'"

Mordaunt's tightly folded arms could not conceal the agitation that shook him. He shut his teeth more tightly together, and said nothing.

"The simplest way is for me to continue to absent

myself until the legal period of desertion entitles her to a divorce," continued Darrell. "I prefer that the blame should fall on me alone, for the sake of the children. I will not consent, however, to endure a grosser charge, as I have never been guilty of any, and care very much about my character as an honest man. In the meantime, if you will excuse a suggestion, I think you ought not to stay so much in Auburn. If Anna wishes to leave here and accompany you to some distant place—say in the South or West—where you are both unknown, it will not be so objectionable. I do not pretend to dictate, but Auburn people are sad gossips. As soon as she gets her papers that will sever her connection with me, I hope—I hope—that you will do your best to repair the wrong you have done."

He seemed to wait as if for a word from the man he addressed, but there was none. He then continued in the same quiet strain, looking at the clump of trees across the street:

"There are the children. Of course, she will want them both. If I had proceeded in the ordinary way, I could have taken them from her; but the last thing I wish in the world is revenge. I will provide whatever she thinks is right toward their support. I suppose some people think I do not love my children, knowing that I have been so much from them. That is not true. Perhaps she has an idea—perhaps some one has told her—that I shall marry again. I do not think so. There was a time, in my younger days, when I believed Miss Casson's love necessary to my happiness. That time has passed. As I have told you, all our relations have been as pure as could be imagined. We have been friends, and are still so, but no more. If you will tell Anna this.

some time when you are together, I will thank you. I do not wish to increase the regrets that will be inseparable from her new position, for I know that she has a conscience that will not let her rest content ; but it is only justice to me that she should hear this.'

A passer-by would have thought the two men were discussing some very ordinary affair. Darrell spoke in a monotone, as if he were arranging something for a third party.

"There is the house." He indicated it with a motion of his thumb. "That is hers, of course. The furniture and everything in it she is welcome to. I hope she will go away soon, and not stay to hear the talk that will be made, or to reply to questions. If she is willing that I should see the children sometimes, she can write to me, saying when and where. If she had rather I would not speak to them, I would like to go where I can occasionally see them pass. I hope she will not speak too harshly of me to them. It is all very strange. I cannot comprehend her leading this new life. She always seemed so innocent. I trust that you will use her well. She is very sweet and gentle. You had best not take her into society, after your—your marriage—even in a new country where you are unknown. She would not shine there. Her place is in some quiet village like Auburn."

He paused, and his eyes roamed for a moment across the valley.

"I am saying a good many things pretty rapidly, but I have to speak as they occur to me. Anna has an aunt here, a Miss Burton, whose heir she ought to be. I hear that the woman has recently changed her will, because of her hatred to me. If she is told that Anna intends to get a divorce, she will probably

make another will like the first. Of course, you would have to keep in the background. It is something worth saving, over a hundred thousand dollars. I am a Socialist in my views, but under present conditions, people must have money. Don't forget to speak to her of this and to urge it upon her. She is careless in such matters. She can use the money to educate the children. The younger one, Ethel, will be very bright, if I am not mistaken. The elder is a quiet little thing, very much like her mother, or rather like what I used to think her mother was. I shall give her as much as she wishes, but the aunt's money ought to be looked after. Yes—it ought to be looked after."

He seemed lost in thought for a moment, and added :

"That is all, I believe, unless you think of something."

For the first time he met Mordaunt's gaze and was evidently startled to see the convulsed anger that filled it.

"You—you *do* think of something?" said he.

"Yes, I *do* think of something!" said Mordaunt, with thick utterance. "I think that you are the most contemptible of all living creatures! I think that I ought to put my hands on your throat and choke your miserable soul out of you!"

Darrell's surprise was evident, but he responded, apparently quite unperturbed :

"Softly, Mordaunt, softly!"

"The idea of your coming here," continued the other, threateningly, "with this silly pack of sentences, based, as you well know, on the blackest falsehoods ever invented in hell! The idea that you can stand there like a cur, and utter such vile

insinuations against the purest, noblest woman that Heaven could give to such a wretch as you ! To pretend to my face that you believe me guilty of offenses which you ought to blush to think of ! To slander thus your devoted wife, the angelic mother of your children ! God, Edmund Darrell ! how could even infatuation for another woman so have changed you !”

Darrell still seemed unmoved.

“You deny everything, then ?” he said. “I was hardly prepared for that, and yet it did occur to me that you might do so. But your violence is ill-timed. I assure you that I have proofs.”

“Proofs !” exclaimed Mordaunt, in a tone of mingled rage and astonishment.

“Indeed, yes, plenty of them. You cannot wish to drive me to produce them. As I have told you, I much prefer the milder way ; but if you compel me I shall bring forth my witnesses.”

Mordaunt turned toward his accuser and hissed the word “Liar !” in his face. He could not bear to touch him, and yet it seemed impossible to resist.

“It is evident that I shall have to tell you,” said Darrell, with a demeanor that seemed frigid when compared to the heat shown by his companion. “You have been in Auburn for months and have visited my wife almost every evening.”

“Admitted,” replied Mordaunt, defiantly. “But does character count for nothing ? Is Anna Darrell the kind of woman who cannot meet her friends in her own residence, under the roof that covers her children, without suspicion ? Say nothing about me—leave me out of the question—do you claim that this is true of your wife ?”

Darrell shook his head slowly.

"It is useless, Harry. I did not wish for this scene. You and she have driven out in the Brixton forest and met there time and again. You have been watched."

"And the children—were they not always with her?"

"The children," replied Darrell, impressively, "are very young."

Mordaunt lifted his clenched fist.

"I can bear no more of this!" he cried, raising his voice. "You will force me to doing that which I shall be sorry for. There must be ways to get rid of your present wife and secure the one you seek for without this wholesale slander. Anna Darrell is a woman whom no temptation could persuade to baseness. To you, or to anyone who has poisoned your ears with these tales, I repeat that they are *lies, lies, LIES!* I came here and found her friendless. I have visited at her house. I have sometimes met her when out driving, and we have stopped to talk. But never the suspicion of a thought that you and all the world might not have known has passed between us. I am about to leave Auburn. A minute before I met you I said good-bye to her, as I was going away in the morning. Every insinuation that you make against her is groundless, and I cannot trust myself to listen to you any longer."

"Let me suggest that you calm yourself," was the quiet reply. "You are inexplicably excited for a perfectly innocent man. The extraordinary interest that you take in defending my wife, would be considered by some as in itself suspicious."

All the affection that Mordaunt had learned to feel for Anna Darrell swept over him. His hand dropped to his side and his voice trembled.

"I *do* take an interest in her," he said, earnestly. "I have learned what a treasure it is that you have cast aside. I have hoped and prayed for the day when you would return, that I might try to persuade you to treat her in a manner more consonant with her worth. It seemed to me that I could show you your great mistake. She is not the uninteresting woman you have represented her. With a little cultivation she would adorn any circle. I have seen the sweetness of her motherhood. I have noted the tender way in which she always speaks of *you*, never even by implication complaining of your dastardly conduct. She has known for some time that you have returned from Europe, though you were 'too busy' with your affairs at Boston to write her a word, and all that she has done has been to excuse you and hope each day for your advent. Never a murmur has escaped her, though there were traces of tears that she could not hide and a lowness of spirits that testified of the loyal heart that was breaking."

The husband listened attentively.

"She was doubtless indebted to you for the information that I was so near," he suggested.

"By no means. I held my peace, fearing to add to a burden that I could see was becoming already too great. One of the townspeople, the grocer whom she patronizes, told her of meeting you, and when she mentioned it to me, I tried to pretend ignorance, but could not. Her aunt, Miss Burton, knew all about it; half the town, for what I know. She was aware that you corresponded with me, and when she told me what she had learned I could no longer deny it."

Darrell let his gaze fall on the patch of grass which bordered the walk at his feet.

"Perhaps she knows more," he said, slowly. "Perhaps she has heard of—of Miss Casson?"

"She has."

"Really! And for that knowledge, she was not, either, I presume, indebted in any way to you?"

"On the contrary, I have done everything to shield you. Smile, if you will—"

"I am not smiling," interpolated Darrell.

"You are incredulous, however."

"Naturally."

"Then I will tell you no more," returned Mordaunt, angrily. "If my reputation for truth avails me nothing, I am foolish to waste words on you. Let me only repeat before I leave that your wife is the purest woman I ever met, and that, in neglecting her as you do, you are casting aside a pearl the like of which you will not find again. I had hoped to see you restored to her in the intimate relations which she has a right to demand and expect. After the glimpses of your inner self which you have given me to-night I can only hope that you will carry out your purpose of abandoning her. I can conceive no worse fate for such a woman than to spend a lifetime in your company."

He had turned on his heel and taken a step away when the branches of the hedge that enclosed the homestead were parted and Anna Darrell's face appeared. It was a face white with excitement, and she looked more like a spirit than a living soul. Both men started at the unexpected apparition.

"I have heard every word," she said, in a voice that was full of surprising firmness, "and I have something to say to both of you. Will you come into the house?"

Darrell was astonished even more than Mordaunt

at her manner, at once so gentle and so commanding.

He did not like to prolong the scene, but he thought it the better way to comply, and he started toward the gate without speaking. Mordaunt waited a second, wishing to escape, if possible.

"Are you sure you want me also?" he asked her.

"I want you both."

He waited no longer, but followed Darrell. At the steps of the house Anna met them.

"Walk as quietly as you can," she said, "and speak only in low tones. I would like not to disturb the servants."

They tiptoed into the parlor with the stealthiness of burglars. Each of the men felt how much this action increased the oddity of the situation. Having closed the door softly, Mrs. Darrell faced her companions, with great self possession.

"My spying upon you was wholly accidental," she said, addressing her husband. "I had gone to my room, in which a window happened to be open. I heard your voice and I could not help listening. When I discovered whom you were talking with, I thought it would be a pleasant thing to surprise you. It was only when I was near enough to catch the drift of your conversation that I found it advisable to pause."

She looked appealingly at him, hoping that he would say something, but he did not. Stopping to take a deeper breath, she continued :

"I have been a child all my life, Edmund. Tonight, in one moment, I became a woman. You wish to leave me. It shall be so. Were you to ask it now, with all the apologies you could make, I would never be a wife to you again. I will go from

Auburn as soon as I can get ready, and I will take the children with me. If you wish to help support *them*, I presume you will have a right to do so. I do not know how bad you consider me—when you think I first became unfaithful—but you do not doubt, I suppose, that you are the father of Alice and Ethel?”

For the first time a spasm of deadly pain crossed Darrell's features.

“No, no !” he cried, in a hoarse whisper. “There was no need of saying that !”

“There was a question I meant to put to you,” she went on, icily, “but I no longer care to have it answered. When my Aunt Burton told me that you were living in Boston with another woman—when she went so far as to disinherit me for my blind faith in you—I said to her, ‘Edmund will not lie to me ; I will ask him.’ But now it makes no difference. You have doubted me, and whether you have been true or false I care not. For eight years I have professed to be your wife. You know how you have treated me. You know how I have borne it. I have had no friends, no intimate acquaintances. This summer Mr. Mordaunt came here. He has been a brother to me, never anything more, in word, deed, or, I believe, in thought. He has acted like a brother to you, also. He told me that the stories about you were falsehoods. Now, there is only one thing more. You have made insinuations against my honor to-night which will forever divide you and me. I only ask you to say, before you go, whether you still believe them.”

Darrell was powerfully affected by his wife's words. He had never heard her utter anything beyond the most ordinary expressions, and her new eloquence

positively astounded him. Was this the woman whose ignorance he had so long pitied and despised? In spite of her extreme paleness, he saw, also, that she had a beauty of face and a dignity of carriage that he had never noticed. She was standing, as were also both the others, and her full, dark eyes did not flinch as he looked up at her.

"If you deny it—" he began.

"I do not!" she interrupted. "I cannot stoop to deny a thing that has never entered my thoughts—that would be as impossible to me as the murder of my children! Aside from what I may or may not say, candidly, unequivocally, do you believe I have been untrue? I want your answer."

He looked up again, but could not endure the gaze which she fixed upon him. Then he looked at Mor-daunt, in whose face was pictured the most intense sympathy for the accused woman. There was no guilt in either countenance—and yet—he had heard.

"I have been told—" he began again.

"Excuse me, Edmund, but you are not answering me."

"What can I do," he broke out, in desperation, "when they come to me with witnesses, when they pile up the most damaging circumstantial evidence? I have told your friend here—I have told Mr. Mor-daunt—that I do not wish to accuse you in public. I am willing to go farther than that and say I never *will* accuse you. I prefer—I have *said* I preferred—to let all the obloquy of our separation fall on me. I am sure I do not see what more I could offer. You would not like to be brought into court in a suit for divorce and confronted with evidence."

"I would!" exclaimed his wife, earnestly.

"Oh, you do not know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do. If there is any way it can be accomplished, I shall insist on it. If there is any person, however contemptible, who dares accuse me of wrongdoing, I wish to be brought face to face with him, before some tribunal that can decide between us. I shall then be able to leave the court room with either my guilt or my innocence established. To-day, some skulker is abroad with invented stories. I cannot put my hand upon him. He can talk, and not only you, but possibly others will listen to him. I entreat you, bring this matter into court without delay. I want to know who it is that charges me—*me*—with dishonor!"

She drew herself up until she seemed the tallest of the three, and no American judge or jury would have hesitated a moment in pronouncing her an innocent woman.

"I repeat," said Darrell, somewhat confused, "that I did not wish for any scene. It seems unnecessary to say all of these things. I came here ready to do anything in reason, for I had wrestled with my first anger and conquered it. I am aware that I have been much to blame, but I believed in you, Anna, and was only led to doubt by testimony that seemed irrefragible."

"I had testimony, too," she answered, "and my reply was, 'I will ask him.'"

"That is not the usual way of deciding such things," he replied. "But if you have evidence against me, it is your duty to prosecute."

"Then it is also yours. You are wiser than I in the ways of the law, and it is for you to begin."

Her calmness disconcerted him.

"I do not wish to injure your good name," he said. "I had much rather protect it if I can. And

then, there are others to be thought of beside yourself."

She knew that he referred to the children. She leaned an arm on the mantel marble by which she stood, feeling suddenly the need of support, and by a strange coincidence the door opened at that moment and the little ones were seen peering in, dressed in their night clothes.

"Oh, I knew it was my papa!" cried the elder, starting to run toward him. "It is my darling papa, come back to us again!"

The mother put out her hands and drew the child against her skirts before she reached her destination. It was an intuitive act, and one that she knew on a moment's reflection she could not defend. Alice looked up into her mother's face inquiringly.

"You are not dressed. You should not have come in like this without permission."

"But I heard his voice! And he has been gone so long!" exclaimed the child, wrapping herself in the folds of her mother's dress.

Then she gazed at the entire party in turn and knew that something unusual was the matter.

Ethel came slowly along, her hands clasped behind her. Her father made a movement to attract her to himself, but she walked straight to Mordaunt and paused at his side.

"Why, Ethel, it is papa!" cried Alice, ashamed of the conduct of her sister.

"Me don't know 'im," was the positive reply. "Me knows Mis'r Mordaunt. He tates me to wide."

"I think it is time I should go," said Mordaunt, in a tone of distress. "Indeed, I must say good-night and good-bye again."

"In a few moments," responded Mrs. Darrell. Then, to the children: "You must run back to bed; it is too late for you to be up."

Alice hesitated, clinging to the skirts.

"Mayn't I kiss my papa once before I go?" she asked, her voice full of tears.

"No," was the firm reply. "You must obey me, I am not pleased with you for coming in without asking leave."

Darrell's color had fled. He took hold of the back of a chair to steady himself.

"Do you refuse my children leave to kiss me?" he gasped.

"I do!" she answered, defiantly.

"But they can kiss *him*!"

He indicated Mordaunt, who had stooped in response to Ethel's tugging fingers and was receiving the baby lips on his cheek.

"Yes, if they wish."

Darrell lost control of himself.

"Then, all I say is—" he began.

"Wait a minute!" commanded his wife, raising her voice. "They must not hear you!"

She disappeared for an instant with the little ones. During her absence the husband raved mutely, like a man bereft of reason.

"You have gone too far!" he exclaimed, when she returned. "You have extinguished all the mercy that I had for you. I shall make your shame public and compel you to surrender the children you are no longer fit to own."

"Try it!" Her eyes flashed. "When a court says they are yours, you may take them away. Until then, they are in my charge, and your touch shall not pollute them."

"I beg you both to remember where you are," exclaimed Mordaunt, speaking for the second time.

"I know where I am," retorted Darrell. **"I am in my own house, where I can say what I please."**

"In your own house?" echoed the wife.

He bowed ironically.

"I beg your pardon," he said, **"I forgot. It was a present to you from me, I believe. Well, I will go. You and your lover are welcome to it."**

Mordaunt strode before him, pale with anger.

"Insult me no more!" he cried between his teeth. **"I shall leave Auburn to-morrow, as I told you. I am now going to the hotel. Mrs. Darrell, even to please you I cannot remain longer. My presence is evidently only an irritant. Good night."**

Saying this, Mordaunt hastily descended to the street. As he opened the gate he caught sight of George Clarkson, who stood near, wearing an exultant smile.

Then it flashed upon him all at once who had told Darrell the falsehoods which had led to the scenes of the evening. Stung to sudden madness, Mordaunt struck the man a blow that felled him to the earth like a log; and without pausing to see whether he rose or not, he walked off in the direction of the Auburn House.

CHAPTER XV.

JIM BRODIE'S WARNING.

If ever a man was uncomfortable, Harry Mordaunt was so when he reached his room that night, and dropped into a chair to muse for hours on the situation in which he found himself. He never thought of going to bed. Sleep was impossible, and it would have been useless to go through the labor of undressing. He had hoped to accomplish so much, and all his efforts had only resulted in making everything worse than it was before. In fact, his interference had precipitated the very difficulties he had wanted to avert. It was true that Darrell and his wife had been all the time standing on a powder mine; but their well-meaning friend had touched it off and witnessed the explosion. Reconciliation was now out of the question. Neither of the interested parties wished for it. Each believed the other guilty of all that was evil. Harsh words had been exchanged which could never be forgotten. Both were bent on settling their grievances in that most frightful tribunal on earth, a divorce court.

I have long held the belief—I, who write these lines—that there should be some means of separating married couples who have reached a stage where their union becomes a curse, without its being necessary to charge either of them with violating all the commands of the decalogue, or all the ordinances of a State.

The bitterness of the average suit for annulment of marriage is well known. There is no doubt that

the truth is frequently sacrificed to attain the desired end, and that reputations are often ruined which should be left untarnished. Two persons can present themselves, with little or no preliminaries, before a clergyman, justice of the peace, mayor or alderman, and in a few minutes they are covenanted in the most important of all bonds. When time has passed, and this pair have discovered their total inadaptability to each other—as a certain proportion of them are sure to do—why should they not be able to go to some competent judge, not with accusations of infidelity, assault, desertion or drunkenness, but hand in hand, and ask to have the instrument that tied them set aside? "We have tried marriage," they might say, with perfect good nature, to the magistrate, "and we cannot agree as man and wife should. In case we are obliged to continue in wedlock, we shall quarrel, we shall separate. Relieve us, we pray you, while we are still friends." And the judge should answer them, "Put your signatures to this document, which recites your petition. In six months from to-day, if you are in the same mind, come again, and the writing of divorce shall be yours."

"A terrible suggestion!" cries some one who reads these lines. "Half the marriages would be annulled, if the process were made so easy!" But if that be true, my friend, it is unnecessary to argue further in behalf of my proposition. The angels look down on no sadder sight than a home occupied by unsuitably mated people. The wife is familiar with curses and frowns, if not with blows; and yet she goes on bearing children, who grow up in a hell for the making of which they are not responsible. One terrible mistake blasts the whole life of the husband and father. Perhaps fear of notoriety, or the

teachings of religion, keep them for a long time from applying for dissolution of the painful tie. But at last they stand in a witness box, with the laughing world in the spectators' seats, and recall every unkind expression, every dastardly deed of years. The newspapers tell the story as amusingly as their brightest writers can record it, and the decree is entered. Even with this terrible method, one marriage in every eight is broken now in a State that has earned the title of the "Land of Steady Habits." The opponents of easier divorce might as reasonably oppose the amputation of a finger which has become infected by a deadly virus. Soon the hand will feel the effect; then the wrist; then the forearm. The surgeon will come and remove the entire limb, or perhaps neglect it until the patient's system is so impregnated that death ends his pain.

Mordaunt thought for hours, but could see nothing in the gloomy horizon that promised a ray of hope. Mrs. Darrell would keep her word and leave Auburn, of that he felt certain. Whatever she did, he must see her no more. Should he write her a letter of farewell? He felt that it would be inadvisable. The best thing he could do was to absent himself and cease all connection with her affairs, for the present, at least. Miss Burton had been right in one thing, if in nothing else. It was impossible for him to aid her niece without exciting suspicion. If this had been true before, it was doubly so now, when the exasperated husband would probably lose no time in bringing his name into the suit he was about to prosecute. He seemed quite hopeless in the present emergency. If it was cowardly to fly, it was also indiscreet to remain. After long consideration, he decided he would go at once to Boston and lay the

case before a prominent lawyer there, whom he had known for many years. He looked at his watch and saw that it was half-past two o'clock. He began to pack his baggage to divert his mind.

While engaged in this occupation several taps were heard at his door, so low at first that he paused before answering, in doubt whether they were really knocks at all. When they were repeated a second time, slightly louder than before, he opened the portal and found Landlord Upham waiting there.

"'Sh!" said the landlord, putting his finger to his lips and stepping gingerly over the threshold. He shut the door behind him without a particle of noise. "Ah, you are packing up, are you?" he said, in a whisper, as he saw the clothing scattered about. "I thought you would be getting ready, but I came up to make sure. Don't you be any afraid of me," he went on, noticing Mordaunt's astonishment. "I'll stick to you through thick an' thin. The best thing for you to do is to let me drive you over to War'ick and git the train there."

Mordaunt looked the landlord all over and then surveyed himself in the mirror to make sure that he was awake.

"Will you be so kind as to tell me what you are talking about?" he inquired.

"'Sh!" said Mr. Upham, again. "Don't talk too loud. There's no train out of Auburn before eight o'clock and the sheriff 'll be after you before that. If he don't find you here, he'll drive over to Brixton, sure as you're living. If you're ready in fifteen minutes I'll put you and your bags into my buggy and you can get the New York express at War'ick, where there's a junction with the Northern. If they found out I took you, that won't prove I understood

the reason for yer runnin' off. I don't care a rap any way! 'Taint nothin' criminal to give a man a ride, as I knows on. An' by Goshen, I like you, an' I allus did like you, and I aint goin' to see you locked up right out of my house, if I can help it."

Though all of this was said in a whisper, in the dead silence of the room each word was perfectly clear to the person to whom it was addressed. But he was still quite as much in the dark as ever as to what it was all about.

"Mr. Upham," he said, "I may be very dull or very stupid, but I do not in the least understand this. Who is it that wants to lock me up, and why?"

The landlord opened his mouth very wide.

"Wall, now," he said, in an injured tone, "you ought to have more confidence in me than that. I don't ask you to admit anything. You were packin' when I came up, and somebody 'il have to drive you over. If you've got any one else—"

"Please to tell me," interrupted Mordaunt, impatiently, "why anybody needs to drive me over to Warwick Junction or anywhere else? I intended to leave town on the eight o'clock train, but I know of nothing that should cause me to take such surreptitious methods as you propose."

The landlord's expression changed to something like admiration.

"You think it's best to stay and have it out then?" he said.

"Oh, don't bother me!" cried Mordaunt. "I tell you for the third time that I don't understand you. Why can't you answer a plain question? What reason is there that I should run away?"

Mr. Upham evidently thought this the most obdurate man he had ever encountered.

"You wasn't down to Darrell's house last night, I s'ppose?" he said, insinuatingly.

"Yes, I was."

"And Darrell didn't come home, and there wa'n't no row? And that George Clarkson, who used to live here, didn't meet you as you come away? And you didn't have no blows with him?"

Mordaunt's face showed that he comprehended at last.

"Do you mean to say that he is contemptible enough to want to have me arrested for that?" he asked.

"Wall—no," replied the landlord, slowly. "*He* ain't done nothin' about it—that is, pussonally. He ain't likely to do much about it just now, neither, I guess. He was found lyin' where you left him. They carried him into Mrs. Darrell's, and he ain't spoke sence. But the night watch as found him heard about you bein' there and as how it was probably you as hit 'im, an' he's gone off to git the sheriff, who lives six or eight miles up the mountain. An' if we stand talkin' here much longer he'll be down with a pair of irons and clap you into the lock-up. I guess you understand it now, an'll appreciate the need of steppin' lively."

Mordaunt was much disturbed by this news. He had not thought of Clarkson since he dealt him that sudden blow, and had had no idea till now that his hurt could be of a serious nature.

"How did you hear this?" he asked.

"Jim Brodie, my hos'ler, come to wake me up an' tell me," replied Mr. Upham. "You see Jim happened to be along with the watch when he found Clarkson, an' he helped to carry him into the house. Mrs. Darrell was still up, and she and the gals did

all they could for him till Dr. Stevens come. Jim hung round and heard the doctor say somethin' about concussion of the brain, an' that such cases was very unsartin. When they came out the watch never said nothin' to Jim, but went and hitched up his hoss and started up the mountain road. Jim pertended he was goin' home, but he hid till he see the watch start off toward Dickenson's, and then he legged it here and woke me up in a jiffy. 'I like that feller,' he says, (meanin' you) 'an' I don't want no harm to happen to him. So, if you'll rouse him up, I'll be harnessin' the mare and have everything ready.' I flung on my clothes as soon as I could get into 'em, an' here I am."

This was a pretty kettle of fish! To be accused of an aggravated assault, at least, and perhaps a murder. Mordaunt tried to think what it was best to do. All his instincts rebelled against the proposal to run away. But, on the other hand, he did not relish the prospect of being shut up in a miserable country lock-up, or to be held for trial, perhaps during long months, while the question of Clarkson's recovery lay in doubt. He decided that it was better on the whole to sink his pride and put a long distance between himself and Auburn.

"If the man dies," he reflected, "I can come back and defend myself. If he gets well, he has got no more than he deserved. I did not mean to hurt him seriously."

Then he addressed himself to the landlord.

"I will be ready in five minutes. Here, you can take this bag now, and I will be down as soon as possible with the other one."

Mr. Upham looked at his watch.

"There aint no time to waste," he said, briefly.

"We can jest about git the train if nothing breaks down. Don't put too many frills into yer packin', nor be too pertikerler to see that yer hair's parted straight. Yer won't be likely to meet no ladies between here an' War'ick. Come down the back stairs and don't make no extry noise."

When Mordaunt arrived at the stable the bay mare was ready harnessed. Jim Brodie seized his valise and placed it under the seat with the other. Jim had received many an extra dollar from Mordaunt that summer, for the fine care he had given the latter's pet saddle horse, but he drew back when an attempt was made to press a twenty dollar bill into his hand.

"No, I thank you, not this time," he said, positively. "I wouldn't have you think I done this for money. You allus used me hansom', Mr. Mordaunt, and I'd do a good deal more'n this to get you out of a scrape."

"I know that, but you had better take it, Jim," was the pleasant reply.

"No, thank you," insisted the man, edging away. "Look out goin' down the steep hill at Sternville, Mr. Upham. If they come here I'll throw 'em off the scent. Good-bye, and luck go with you!"

CHAPTER XVI.

OFF THE SCENT.

The mare bounded off with quick, short steps, and the riders found themselves making splendid time on the road to the Junction.

"The train is due at 3.54," said the landlord, consulting his watch, "but sometimes it's a little late. We'll make it, either way. Have you made up your mind how far you'll go before you leave the cars?"

"Why, to New York, of course."

"Whew! You might as well stay in Auburn as to do that. More'n likely an officer 'll be waitin' there for you. Let—me—see. Jason started for Dickenson's about two o'clock. He'll git there at three and git back at half-past four sure, with the carriage. They'll drive to the hotel and find you gone. By the time they've got that through their heads it'll be five. Then they'll go to Brixton, which'll take till quarter of six. That'll catch the other train an' they'll see you're not there. By six o'clock they'll come to the conclusion that you went from War'ick, an' they'll git the operator out of bed and telegraph the New York police to nab you. It's a close shave and you'd better not resk it."

Mordaunt replied that he saw the value of the advice and would profit by it.

"I s'pose you're not used to this escapin' business," pursued the landlord, retrospectively, as he tightened his reins. "It's a kind of science. I've done consid'able of it in my time. It wouldn't sound well in the village, but I don't mind tellin' you, under

the circumstances. Durin' the war, I did a little business on my own account that took me through the lines. If they'd caught me I'd a swung for sartin. But 'twas prof'table, an' a man must take chances. There's enough bad things about wars, an' if there's any good in 'em at all, why not take advantage of it? I recollect one mornin', jest like this one, when a picket fired a shot at me in the woods near Chantilly. I was crawlin' along in the underbrush, inch by inch, when 'pop' went his gun. Gosh, how I did run! I'd been back to Auburn before now, if I hadn't let up. You see, when the bounties got pretty large I enlisted and went out to save my country. I got \$1,200, all told, that time, but I didn't like the job after I got into it, so I cleared out an' went North. They was offerin' higher yet when I got back to New York, an' the fever to help this glorious Union came on me too strong to resist. I signed a second time for \$1,450 in cold cash, and was sent to Tennessee. The mountain air there made me homesick, and I soon left ag'in. By that time I had formed a sort of habit an' I couldn't stay nowhere. I jest kept enlistin' an' enlistin' till the war was over."

The landlord chuckled softly to himself as he spun this yarn, but Mordaunt was too much occupied with his own thoughts to make more than the briefest reply.

"There's War'ick," said Mr. Upham, as they gained the top of the hill. He pointed to a scraggly village that could be seen several miles ahead. "I'll drive down within twenty or thirty rods of the station and then turn into a road in the woods. You'd better hang on till you hear the whistle, to see if anything looks suspicious; then, if all is safe,

you can git aboard without any one noticin' me. If there's any trouble, I'll be waitin' with the mare and we'll give 'em a chase they won't forgit. I guess it's all right, though. Nobody's passed us on the road, and there aint one chance in a thousand that Dickenson could have got to Auburn and telegraphed round. Stay on the train a couple of hours and then leave it quietly and double on your track like a fox. I'll never forgive you if you let 'em ketch you after all I've done."

"I won't," replied Mordaunt. "But there's something you can do for me. I shall want to hear how the man gets along, and I've no one to rely on but you. Supposing I give you an address to write or telegraph to. You could manage it so that nobody would suspect, couldn't you?"

"You can bet your life on that," responded the landlord. "Leave me a false name and I'll send you word every day as long as there's need of it. You can write to me safe enough, if you disguise your hand on the envelope."

Mordaunt thought a minute and then took out his card-case and wrote: "Joseph Vassar, care Broadway Bank, N. Y. City." Handing this to Mr. Upham, he said, "Send your news there and I shall not be long receiving it. I cannot believe the man is hurt so much. It was just one quick blow."

"You wouldn't mind tellin' me what the row was about?" said Mr. Upham, interrogatively. "I've kep' all your secrets this far, and I'm interested to understand it all, you know."

Mordaunt sighed heavily.

"I can't," he answered. "The affair is the business of other people. It is one of those cases where nobody was altogether to blame, and yet where a

great deal of trouble must come. I wish—I wish—you wouldn't ask me anything more."

There were no suspicious-looking people at Warwick Junction. In fact, Mordaunt was the only passenger who appeared on the platform; and in two minutes from the time the engine halted, Mr. Upham saw the smoke of it disappearing in the direction of the New York State line. He drove back to Auburn by a partially different road from the one on which he had come, and reached his stable yard as the town clock was striking four.

Half an hour earlier, true to the time-table which the landlord had improvised, Sheriff Dickenson and Watchman Jason had driven up to the hotel and pulled the front bell. As no one responded, after a delay of a minute or more, they pulled it again, upon which Jim Brodie emerged from the yard, rubbing his eyes as if aroused from the soundest sleep.

"Don't make such a noise?" he said, in a low voice, though in fact beyond the tinkling of the little bell the two men had been as quiet as if a funeral were in progress. "The boss ain't well. He left word that he mustn't be disturbed."

The men left the piazza as quietly as they could and approached the hostler with a mysterious air.

"I suppose you know what we're after," said Jason, with a sly wink.

"No, I'll be hanged if I do," replied the hostler.

"Well, we want that Mr. Mordaunt who assaulted the feller that's lyin' up to Mrs. Darrell's."

Jim stared at them with an expression of utter stupidity.

"It's a nice time of night to be makin' calls!" he growled. "Aint daylight good enough for you?"

You'd had the whole house woke up in a minute more."

The sheriff eyed the man with a look of official pity for his ignorance.

"It's my duty as an officer to arrest him," he said, impressively. "Dr. Stevens says that Clarkson may die. We can't stop to think of the time of day when there's a murderer to be took. If you've got a key, let us in, and we'll take him off quietly. If you haven't, we'll have to rouse the landlord, that's all. The law"—he assumed an air of importance,—“the law, sir, cannot wait the convenience of any one.”

But Brodie, realizing that each minute might be worth much to the fugitive, parleyed with the officer for some time longer. He brought to bear every argument he could think of to cause delay. Dr. Stevens, he said, was an old Betty, whose opinion wasn't worth a sou markee. Mr. Mordaunt was a gentleman, and ought not to be locked up on what was, after all, only a guess, as no one pretended to have seen him strike the injured party. It was a disgrace to the Auburn House to have it entered in the night time on such an errand. Then, when Dickenson swept all of these considerations aside, the hostler declared that he knew enough of law to be sure that no one could be arrested like this without a warrant, and that he should advise Mr. Mordaunt to snap his fingers at the sheriff until he had such a document in his possession.

"There's no use in talking any more," said Mr. Dickenson, losing patience at last. "I'm going to arrest that man, warrant or no warrant, and the sooner you open the door the better. When a murder's been committed, it's time to catch the murderer, and it won't do to stand too long on a fine point.

If you do anything to hinder us, Jim, I shall proceed against you for interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty."

This awful threat seemed to frighten Brodie, for he made only a muttered protest in reply, and after more bungling and trying of various keys, he opened the door as requested, and the officers went softly up the front stairs. It took them but a moment to discover that their prey had flown, and they returned in a state of great excitement.

"He's gone!" they cried in chorus, when they reached the piazza again. "Gone, bag and baggage!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Jim, staring stupidly at them.

"When did you see him last?" demanded the sheriff, excitedly.

Brodie seemed to be cudgeling his memory.

"Why, he was here at supper, last night," he said, "I talked with him myself. Oh, yes, an' he started toward the station just before eight o'clock, as he's been doin' for a long time. P'raps," he brightened, "p'raps he took the train then!"

Jason shook his head in response to an inquiring look from the sheriff.

"I tell you Mrs. Darrell said he was there with her husband as late as eleven o'clock! He's been back since and packed up. You know what she said as well as I do," he continued, harshly. "Mordaunt left about eleven, and her husband a few minutes later. And she told us all she heard was her husband's voice two or three times, after he passed the gate, calling, 'Clarkson! Clarkson! Where are you?' and then his steps walking quickly down the street. The men must have had their row just before that,

and the poor fellow had good reasons for not answering when Darrell called him. Well, Mordaunt's skipped," he added, to Dickenson.

The sheriff consulted his watch, whispered something to Jason, and the twain entered their buggy again and started quickly toward Brixton. They had evidently concluded that this was the most probable point for which the fugitive would make.

Jim Brodie went back to the stable, locked the door, and rolled over on the floor in a spasm of delight. For fifteen minutes he kept up this peculiar amusement without cessation, stifling the sound of his laughter by pressing his coat sleeve against his mouth. Before his risibles were fully under control he heard the steps of the bay mare in the yard, and hastily sprang up to admit his employer.

"Yes, they've been here," he said, in answer to the inquiring look of the landlord. He rolled the great barn doors together and fastened them, while both men laid their hands to the work of unharnessing the excitable little beast. "I threw 'em completely off the scent, an' they've jest started pell-mell for Brixton. Did you meet anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"Then help me to get this horse rubbed down and the buggy cleaned, so's Dickenson won't suspect the team of being out when he returns. And as soon as that's done, you git into the house an' go to bed. I told him you wasn't very well and they musn't wake you up. Oh, it was such fun! I've been laughin' fit to kill ever sence. Them two great gawks, lookin' like owls, and imagine that all the law in the country lay on their shoulders!"

And as they proceeded with their work, Jim gave

the landlord, word for word, all the conversation that had passed between him and the officials.

The buggy was hastily cleaned and rolled back behind others that had been washed on the previous evening. The mare was rubbed until almost the last drop of moisture had left her hair, and the harness was thrown under a heap of hay to gain time.

"I hope he'll git away all right," said Jim, when the work was finished.

"Never fear," replied the landlord. "I'm goin to write to him every day or two. He gave me an address."

A quick suspicion came into Brodie's mind. He looked at his employer sharply.

"If the man dies, there'll be a reward offered," he suggested.

"Yes, I s'pose there will."

"A big one, p'raps."

"Mos' likely."

"An' you could get it, if you liked."

"I s'pose I could."

"An' would you?"

The landlord choked down a lump that had risen to his throat.

"No, Jim, not if it was ten million dollars. I like money, but not well enough to git it that way. I'm true blue in this, so help me!"

The hostler eyed him searchingly.

"This man, Mordaunt ain't nothin' to me," he said slowly. "He's only a gen'leman what's treated me white. But do you know what 'd happen if you were to help the perlice to git him?"

Mr. Upham shook his head in the negative.

"Why, some mornin' you'd be found dead with a dung-fork stickin' in you!"

The landlord was not at all flustered by this remarkable assertion.

"An' so I ought, Jim ; so I ought," he said "I've never done anything as mean as that, an' I'm not goin' to commence now I'm fifty years old. Durin' the war, when the gov'ment was a-runnin' them printin' machines, and turnin' out greenbacks by the bushel to pass round, I might have got a few of 'em in a way that wa'n't ginerally approved of. But I aint takin' no blood money, an' you needn't fret at all about that."

"I *won't* fret about it !" said Jim, quite satisfied. "Put it there !"

He held out his brawny hand, which the landlord shook warmly. Then Mr. Upham went into the house and to bed, according to the programme that had been arranged.

It was after seven o'clock when the representatives of the majesty of the law stopped their carriage again in front of the Auburn house. The proprietor was taking breakfast when they found him, and he wore about the eyes the look of a man who is not well.

"I hear one of your boarders skipped in the night," said Dickenson, after the ordinary salutations had passed between the three.

"One of my boarders !"

"Yes, that Mr. Mordaunt. Hadn't you heard ? He struck a man last night, who'll probably die."

"You don't say !" exclaimed the landlord, in apparently profound astonishment. "He owed me a week's board to-morrow. But he'll send it," he added, reflectively. "I don't think he'd cheat me out of a few dollars like that."

It was Mr. Jason's turn to speak.

"Was any of your teams out last night, Mr. Upham?"

"I've jest got up," was the evasive reply. "Bill,"—this to a large boy who was lounging through the room—"tell Jim to come here."

Brodie came in his own good time and bowed to his employer and the visitors.

"Did you catch him?" he asked.

"No, but we know where he's gone, and he'll be caught safe enough," replied Dickenson.

"Did anybody hire any of our teams last night?" asked the landlord.

"No," said Brodie, promptly.

"Or this mornin'?" inquired Jason.

"No, I aint let a team since yisterday."

Then the landlord asked to be told the whole story, and the officers, rather proud of the part they had taken in it, repeated it to him, with all their surmises and theories thrown in.

"Where's Darrell?" asked Mr. Upham, when they had exhausted the subject.

"Well, we don't know. He came to town in a buggy with this man Clarkson and must have drove off alone. It's a devilish queer affair, take it all together."

"How do you know it wa'n't him what hit Clarkson?"

To answer this question they told him all Mrs. Darrell had said, which seemed to dispose of that theory; and besides they argued, Mordaunt's flight was in itself presumptive evidence against him. As there was nothing more to be learned at the hotel, the officers soon after took their departure. As soon as his breakfast was ended, Landlord Upham addressed himself to Brodie.

"I'm goin' down to call on Mrs. Darrell," said he very profoundly. "I don't pretend to understand this whole thing, but I've got an idea she wouldn't like to do Mr. Mordaunt any harm. I'm jest goin' to tell her as gently as I can that she's be'n talkin' a leetle too much."

When the landlord reached the Darrell place, he met Dr. Stevens at the gate.

"He's not recovered consciousness yet," said the doctor, in response to the inquiring look which greeted him. "I have left orders for everything to be kept quiet, but you are a sensible man and can go in if you like."

Mrs. Darrell welcomed the landlord sadly, and readily understood by the motion of his head toward an inner door that he wished to speak to her alone.

"Pretty dangerous, ain't he?" he asked, when she had accompanied him to the parlor.

She immediately assented.

"You know who they suspect?"

"Yes," she said. But it was a very faint yes indeed.

"He's got away from the officers this time an' I don't think they'll ketch him, but if they do it's on your evidence they'll have to rely to convict him."

She looked thoroughly frightened.

"On mine!"

"Yes, you've given 'em all the points they've got so fur. You've told 'em that he was here and that when your husband left he hollered 'Clarkson,' and there wa'n't no answer. Now, you wouldn't like to have any harm happen to Mr. Mordaunt, I'm sure."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, faintly.

"Then take a little advice from an old man what's known you ever sence you wa'n't big enough to

walk. Put a patent curb bit on your tongue, an' keep it there. See that all your girths are pulled up tight and don't let the reins git crossed. Double the hold-back straps and lay right back in the breechin'. They'll be after you—a dozen of 'em—before they git through. Don't let any of 'em make you lose your head ag'in."

After this odd combination of good advice and stable lore, perfectly intelligible, however, to the woman who heard it, Mr. Upham went into the other room and took a look at Clarkson.

CHAPTER XVII.

APPEALING TO THE LAW.

Darrell returned to Boston and went to his room in anything but a happy frame of mind. He resolved not to visit Miss Casson for a few days, for he knew that if he did so he could not very well avoid telling her the particulars of his visit to Auburn. But habit is a thing which controls the best of us. For many years he had gone almost daily to her house, when in the city, and it is not strange that he found himself unable to keep away, now that he had so much on his mind. As soon as the sun had set he went to see her, thinking that he might as well undergo what was before him now as later.

"I am going to tell you everything, Laura," he said, in answer to the mute inquiry that shone from

her eyes. "We have had words—high ones, too—and she has dared me to do my worst."

Miss Casson had schooled herself to suppress her emotions, but her delight at this news was so great that she well nigh broke the barriers. She succeeded, however, in restraining herself, and waited to hear the whole of his story, which he told circumstantially, concealing nothing.

"What shall you do?" she asked, as he concluded.

"Consult a lawyer, and if he advises it, apply for a divorce at once."

"Is not the evidence rather weak?"

She thought it good policy not to appear too much in favor of his scheme.

"Not if Clarkson can be relied upon. I wonder what became of him after I went into the house. Probably he got piqued at having to wait so long. He is a queer fellow. How long have you known him?"

"Only this summer."

"He would not—you do not think he would falsify?" said Darrell, hesitatingly.

She studied his face with an inward alarm, and asked :

"What could be his motive?"

"What motive could he have in getting involved in the matter at all?" Darrell responded, thoughtfully. "I do not think he likes Mordaunt, but that would hardly explain the pains he has taken."

"Perhaps he has a strong sense of justice," suggested Miss Casson. "He is, like ourselves, a Communist, and his sympathies would naturally be on your side. A greater motive should not be needed than to do what is right. If you begin to suspect a

man like him, you may end in suspecting others of your friends ; perhaps even me."

He shook his head at that, and seemed lost in thought for several moments.

"I had no idea how disagreeable such things are," he said, despondently, at last. "Last night was the first time I ever spoke harshly to my wife. I wish I could have escaped that. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

Miss Casson made a gesture of impatience.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you take this too much to heart. A wife who has been unfaithful deserves no such exhibition of tenderness. I cannot say half I think, because I see you are inclined to doubt motives. But the woman who has deceived you once may have done so many times before."

Darrell straightened himself up in his chair, as he answered :

"No, Laura, I do not—cannot—believe that. I have neglected her. Mordaunt came with his smooth tongue and sympathetic ways, and she fell a victim. I am very much to blame—very much indeed."

"I should not think you would talk of a prosecution, if that is your feeling," she replied, coldly.

"Ah!" said he. "But it is necessary." He repeated the expression he had used to her before. "There is but one course open to a man of honor."

She saw plainly that it would be necessary to urge him to his work, before his mind had time to change.

"If you wish my advice," she said, "you will either proceed in this matter without the least delay, or give it up altogether."

"Give it up! I *can't* give it up!" he exclaimed.

"Then you must go to your lawyer to-morrow, and have the papers served as soon as possible. Your witness is ready now, and your facts are easily obtainable. I should think, however, that your wife would prefer to have the affair settled without any more publicity than is necessary, when she comes to think it over."

"She will not," he replied, sadly. "She is determined to 'vindicate her character,' as she calls it. And, by heavens, I don't wonder at it! It is a terrible thing for a woman to go out of a court-room branded as an adulteress. It would be better if the grave closed over her!" Then he stopped, the thought chilling him. "She has to think of her children."

The relentless woman could not afford to allow him to dwell on this subject.

"That is an old excuse for clemency," she said. "She should have thought of them before."

"Oh, Anna does not ask clemency," he interrupted. "She defied me to my face."

A smile, a most ironical smile, rested on Miss Casson's mouth.

"Edmund," she said, meaningly, "you have the most innocent conceptions for a man who should be somewhat versed in the ways of the world. I fear to say as much to you as I ought, because you know I have always regarded this marriage as injurious to you, and have felt that you should have broken it off at all hazards in its earlier days. I knew that some such denouement as this would be the inevitable result of the course you were pursuing. Then there is another thing for me to consider." Her expression grew harder. "If I understand you rightly, she threatens to bring me into the affair,

with what insinuations I do not care to guess. In common justice to me you will have to present your case in all its strength, or my devotion to your highest interest will be misrepresented shamefully to the world. There is no limit to the hatred of a woman who finds herself detected and exposed. I have a right to ask of you at least as much protection as she who has disgraced you, and now proposes to turn your better side toward the public marked with her own wicked imputations !"

Darrell listened and seemed convinced.

"Yes, Laura," he said, simply.

"You must take Clarkson to a notary before he is put under other influences," she proceeded, earnestly. "Have his story taken down and sworn to. This is not a case for soft measures. If she insists that there shall be a fight, see that she is met with suitable weapons. If you prefer to give it up, to forgive her, and go back to your old life, now is your time."

Any other man would have noticed the sarcasm with which she uttered these words, but he did not seem to.

"I can't give it up !" he said again. "No, I must go on. I will see a lawyer to-morrow."

But the next morning, when he dragged himself unwillingly to his attorney's office, and began to tell his story, the legal gentleman stopped him to inquire whether he had read the morning papers. On learning that he had not, he thrust into his hands a column or more headed, "Mysterious Affair at Auburn."

The correspondent who "covered" the Western district, had made up a very readable story out of the assault on Clarkson, for which he was highly

commended by his employers in a letter which accompanied their next check. His dispatch detailed the finding of Clarkson, lying unconscious in front of the Darrell house, and gave an interview with Dr. Stevens, in which the opinion was expressed that his chance of life was precarious. The article further stated that Mrs. Darrell positively refused to be interviewed, but made up for this by a graphic narrative of the adventures of Messrs. Dickenson and Jason, who had no scruples whatever about talking freely. A good many paragraphs beginning "It is said," and "Our correspondent learns from a reliable source," helped out the dispatch, which was adroitly worded to evade suits for libel, in case the matter that it contained should prove incorrect. Darrell read the story through, and then turned to the attorney. The thorough astonishment that he felt was visible in his face.

"A devilish queer thing, eh?" said the lawyer.

"Very," replied Darrell. "And very disagreeable," he added. "If there's anything I hate it is this sort of notoriety. It is intensely unpleasant."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. It might be unpleasant for his client, but it was merely business for him.

In response to questions, Darrell told the lawyer his story, of which minutes were made in an exasperating way, in a book which adorned the desk.

"Clarkson went with you of his own accord?" said the attorney, in recapitulation. "Did he go—what would you say—willingly?"

"I should say eagerly, Mr. Arnold," was the reply

"Umph! Why should he have been eager?"

"I have no idea."

Mr. Arnold wrote this down with some reflections of his own, and then proceeded with his torture.

"And he lagged behind when you heard Mordaunt coming out of the house?"

"Yes."

"How do you account for that?"

"I told him I wanted to speak with Mordaunt first alone."

"Then he did not seem to wish to avoid meeting him?"

"No."

"You were in the house with your wife and Mordaunt not over twenty minutes, you think?"

"About that."

"Mordaunt left first?"

"Yes."

"You went away not more than five minutes later?" continued the lawyer, consulting his notes.

Darrell assented.

"And when you came out you called Clarkson's name several times, loud enough to be heard some distance, and there was no response."

"Exactly."

"Within that five minutes, then, if Mordaunt is the man who assaulted him, the blow must have been struck. Now, what was the motive?"

Darrell said he could not answer that question.

"I can," said Mr. Arnold impressively. "It was jealousy. I have been in business for thirty years, and I tell you there could have been no other reason. Both of these men are in love with your wife."

Darrell felt a rising indignation. He found it impossible not to experience a sensation of personal affront, notwithstanding all that had happened, at any charge which concerned his wife's honor. He

had come to institute preliminary proceedings for a divorce, but he wanted some kind of bounds set.

"Yes, sir," continued the lawyer, confidently. "One of these men was jealous of the other. There were quick words and quick blows. I should say that Mordaunt had supplanted Clarkson in your wife's good graces, and—"

Darrell had a violent pain in the head.

"Mr. Arnold," he interrupted, "if you think such things as that, don't say them. I am not here to listen to your surmises. I want a divorce in the easiest, quickest way."

The lawyer looked at him, as the Pyramids must have looked down upon Napoleon, with all his thirty years of experience in his gaze.

"I can serve the papers," he said, "but while your main witness lies in his present condition, we can do nothing more. If he should die, there would be very little left to work on."

"Oh, Clarkson is liable to recover consciousness at any moment," was the impatient reply. "The best thing to do, it seems to me, is to have one of your men go to Auburn without delay, and take his deposition, as soon as he is able to speak."

"Very well. I will have that done."

"And after that, all we can do is to wait?"

"That is all. Only," Mr. Arnold paused, "it would be as well, you know, to be circumspect in your movements for a while. I wouldn't visit Miss—" he turned to his notes—"Miss Casson any more at present."

The client could not help paling a little under the searching gaze of the lawyer.

"Why, we are nothing whatever but business partners. We own a magazine together"

"Certainly. I understand. But—you had best keep away."

Darrell broke out hotly :

"I shall do nothing of the sort ! It would be in itself a suspicious thing, after all these years. I shall go there as usual, and people can say what they like !"

Mr. Arnold smiled grimly.

"We have a proverb," he said, "that 'the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client.' There is a still more foolish man, the one who hires a lawyer to advise him, and then refuses to take the advice."

"I have paid a doctor before now to prescribe medicine and then thrown it away," responded Darrell, more good-naturedly. "Miss Casson's character is too high for their shafts."

"Have your own way," was the lawyer's reply. "But don't forget that I told you."

During the four-and-twenty hours which elapsed after the inanimate body of George Clarkson was found near the sidewalk in front of the Darrell house, several officers of the law, besides Sheriff Dickenson and Watchman Jason, had heard of the matter and interested themselves in it. One of these, a man named Barnett, was soon struck with a phase of the case which had escaped the others. Nobody suspected Darrell himself of having done the deed. To the mind of Mr. Barnett there were strong probabilities pointing in that direction. Darrell and Clarkson had come to Auburn together in a buggy—on that all information seemed to agree. One of them had left town hastily without the other, a very odd fact except on the theory that the officer was evolving. Why had no suspicion rested upon this

man? Simply because Mrs. Darrell had said that she heard him calling Clarkson's name after he left the house, and did not hear any reply. Now this, according to Barnett, was utter nonsense. If Mrs. Darrell did actually hear Clarkson's name called, as she claimed, that did not prove that her husband had not had words with him and struck him. It was possible, also, that the wife had invented the story for the purpose of shielding her husband, as was quite natural; or it was easy to suppose that, after having struck the man, Darrell had run back to tell his wife what she was to say in case she was interrogated. When the watchman and Jim Brodie found the body, long after her husband left, she was still up and dressed.

Mr. Barnett decided that he was justified in asking the court for a warrant, and while the New York police were searching, aided by Dickenson, who had gone on for the purpose, he hastened to Boston, and laid his hands on Darrell soon after he entered his office that morning after his talk with Lawyer Arnold.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DARRELL UNDER ARREST.

"I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murder," said Mr. Barnett, in response to Darrell's look of astonishment.

"What!" he exclaimed, feeling the earth reeling

around him. At first he never thought of Clarkson or the Auburn affair at all.

"For the murder of George Clarkson," continued Mr. Barnett. "You went from Boston to Auburn night before last ; you returned alone."

Darrell breathed easier when he found what the accusation was. But it immediately occurred to him what his lawyer had said about the effect of the death of his witness, and he grew faint again.

"When did he die?" he asked.

"This morning," replied Barnett, believing everything justifiable that might lead to the detection of crime. "He rallied at the end," he added, narrowly watching the effect of his words, "and told the name of his murderer!"

It was impossible not to be affected by this information, and Darrell started violently.

"Who was it?" he exclaimed.

"You!"

The prisoner seemed dazed for a moment. Then he drew himself up and looked at his captor with an air of supreme contempt.

"You see this warrant," said Barnett, feeling the need of bolstering up his statement, though all the Commonwealth of Massachusetts stood, figuratively, at his back. "It would be better for you not to deny the thing. Probably," he suggested, "you did not intend to strike him so hard?"

Darrell found his tongue at last.

"There must be decent men on your force," he said, cuttingly. "They might at least have sent one of them for me. As you have a warrant that seems to be regular, I shall go with you without the least trouble ; but if you insult me again I will not be responsible for myself. George Clarkson never said

that I touched him, and you know it as you stand there !”

Mr. Barnett drew out a pair of handcuffs as his answer.

“I shall have to put these on you,” he said. “I could have taken you without them had you been civil.”

Darrell held out his wrists.

“Put them on. Put others on my ankles, if you like, but do me the favor to talk to me as little as is necessary.” He touched a bell with his elbow. “Tell Parker to come here,” he said to a boy who answered the summons.

Mr. Parker was general manager of the manufactory, and his surprise at seeing Darrell in irons was pronounced.

“You will please step over to Mr. Arnold’s office, and tell him that I have been arrested and taken to Auburn,” said Darrell, quietly. “I want him to come there at once;—to catch the eleven o’clock train, if he can. Shall we go on the Fitchburg?” he asked of Barnett.

“I have nothing to say,” responded the officer, doggedly. “I am going to do as you requested.”

Darrell bit his lips.

“Never mind. Give him my message,” he said to Parker, who disappeared with celerity. “If you have a dollar’s worth of property I will make it cost you dear for this,” he continued, to Barnett. “False arrests come high sometimes.”

The officer, who had a snug sum laid by in real estate, felt a cold chill creeping along his spine. He wondered if he had been too precipitate.

“You won’t gain anything by threatening me,” he blustered. “I have to do my duty. That war-

ant," he touched his pocket, "is issued by the court, and I must obey it."

He called a carriage, and entered it with his prisoner. Twenty minutes later they rolled out of the Fitchburg station, bound for Auburn. Mr. Arnold succeeded in boarding the same train, and Mr. Barnett, who had now become quite uneasy, willingly consented to allow him to consult with his client.

About eight o'clock that morning George Clarkson had found himself staring at the curtains of his bed, after a long blank of which he remembered nothing. Slowly it came back to him that he had been struck a heavy blow by Harold Mordaunt, and had felt himself falling to the earth. He recalled it all quite clearly. The ride with the taciturn husband, the approach to the house, the sound of Mordaunt's voice, the request of Darrell that he might meet him alone, the half audible conversation between them, the unexpected appearance of the wife upon the scene, the vanishing of the entire party within doors, the long wait, the re-appearance of Mordaunt, the recognition—and the blow.

He wondered how long he had been ill. He knew that impressions were not to be relied upon in such cases, and he fell to imagining that weeks or possibly months had passed. Soon he began to think of Laura Casson, in whose behalf he had taken the risk which led to his present situation. When they came to interrogate him, as they would certainly do, he tried to think what replies would best serve the errand he had set about.

He knew that Miss Casson wished to convince Darrell of his wife's guilt. Why? Perhaps from

pique at something, perhaps from revenge. But what was it to him what her reasons were? He had set out to do her bidding, like some knight of old, caring only that he should be sure of his reward at the end. This affair of his with Mordaunt had complicated matters. Clarkson was an avowed opponent of the force of law. His grievance must be settled by himself if at all. Since it could not help Miss Casson's plan, there was no need of bringing his enemy's name into the matter. He decided as he lay there that in case Mordaunt was suspected, he would deny that he was his assailant, and disavow his knowledge of the man if no particular person was accused.

In the midst of these reveries he heard the soft opening of a door and the whispering of voices. He deemed it the part of wisdom to feign unconsciousness a little longer.

The first comer was the nurse who had been engaged to care for him at night. After a hasty look at the patient, the nurse signified that the other visitors could enter. They were Mrs. Darrell and Landlord Upham.

It was the third visit of the landlord. He had received that morning a letter from Mordaunt, who was resting in a little village in the Adirondacks, and was anxious for the latest information from Auburn.

"He has lain just as you see him," said Mrs. Darrell, in very low tones. "Dr. Stevens said last night when he left, that to-day would decide whether he would recover or not. If he does not have his senses before night, the probability is that he never will."

Clarkson found some difficulty in restraining himself when he heard these words. Nothing but the

semi-darkness of the room prevents his countenance from betraying him. Had he, then, been so near to death? It was very strange that it was Mrs. Darrell's voice. To whom could she be speaking?

"It is hard for you to have him here," replied Mr. Upham. "If he gets well enough to move you must not continue to undergo the strain. I never saw you looking so pale and ill."

"Oh, no," was the rejoinder, "he shall stay here till he is quite ready to travel, or," her tone sank still lower, "till the end. I was ill before this happened. In fact I have not felt well for more than a month. I would not have him removed for anything. There would be a risk in it, the doctor says."

The injured man listened with accelerated pulse. In her house, partaking of her hospitality, of her sympathy! It was too much!

"You haven't heard nothing from his relations?" said the landlord.

"No, but I think we may to-day. I wrote to them at once, using the address that was found in his pocket."

"I wish I had better news to send to Mr. Mordaunt," said the landlord. "It is very unfortunate for him. He told me he never dreamed he'd hit so hard. Now the papers are full of the story, and half of the police of Massachusetts and New York are lookin' for him. Even if nothin' worse happens that must be gallin'. Some of the things in the papers are outrageous. There wa'n't no excuse for bringin' *your* name in."

Mrs. Darrell sighed deeply.

"Yes," she said, "I am very sorry. So many people who do not know me will read those accounts.

Here in Auburn, where I have lived from a child, my reputation is safe. I never wronged a soul in my life, and I cannot understand why I should have such enemies."

The speaker withdrew and the invalid breathed a little freer. But now the infamy of his conduct was presented to him in the boldest outlines. What a price he was paying for the jewel he sought! Could there be no way to establish his own happiness except to ruin that of this innocent woman? It would not have taken much at that moment to extort a confession of his falsity, but there was no one to put the questions, and the opportunity passed by. The only passion of his life was involved. If he had known that he was to rise from that bed other than Laura Casson's accepted suitor, he would have preferred to meet death then and there. Compared with fulfilling her wishes, all honor, all truth, sank to nothing. It was a strange development of the human mind, and not by any means peculiar to the person under discussion.

When Dr. Stevens came at ten o'clock, Clarkson thought it well to act natural. He opened his eyes and made intelligent responses to the questions of the medical man. The doctor went to gladden Mrs Darrell's heart with the news, and soon it spread like wildfire through the town. An avalanche of officials and reporters swept down upon the house, and the muffled bell was pulled continually. Tom Crowell, the boy-of-all-work, was finally commissioned—to his great delight—to sit on the piazza and give this invariable message to all callers :

"Mr. Clarkson is conscious, and will probably recover, but Dr. Stevens has positively forbidden him seeing any one before to-morrow or later."

The newspaper men did not like this "bluff," as they very freely termed it. They had the impression that Clarkson ought to give out a "statement," whether it killed him or not, and each one conceived a special plan for securing it, whenever it should be made, for his own journal exclusively. So great was the enterprise of these knights of the quill, that the cook surprised two of them in the potato cellar, listening near one of the furnace registers believed to communicate with the sick-room, they having entered through a very small window. A special watchman was thereupon engaged to patrol the premises, but his cupidity was not proof against the "persuasions" of one of the Boston reporters, who, after dark, mounted a lightning-rod and nearly burned one of his ears off at the kitchen chimney.

Dr. Stevens refused even to say good-morning when he left the house, and was appropriately excoriated in the evening journals. Landlord Upham, who was exempted from the order of exclusion—for no good reason that any of the reporters could see—came in haste when he heard that Clarkson was conscious, to verify the news. He had to run the gauntlet of a thousand inquiries, but came out unscathed. Half an hour later Jim Brodie drove out of Auburn in an express wagon with a telegram in his pocket, and before three o'clock Mordaunt was in possession of the welcome news in his Adirondack retreat.

Toward the close of the afternoon, another sensation struck the village, and caused a temporary scattering of the guard that had encamped in the neighborhood of the Darrell house. It was learned that Officer Barnett had arrived with his new "suspect," and lodged him in the town lock-up. Bar-

nett was as anxious to talk as Dr. Stevens was to avoid it, and the note-books were soon filled with his experiences and theories. Leave was refused to interview Darrell, but Mr. Arnold was not idle. As soon as he ascertained from Dr. Stevens that Clarkson was practically out of danger, he applied to the nearest authority to admit his client to bail. And before the sun had sunk behind the horizon, Darrell walked out of the lock-up and toward his wife's house, with a regiment of officers, reporters and other people at his heels.

Not a word would he speak to any of them. He strode forward like an iron man. At the gate he paused and asked Tom, who still stood sentinel, if he would request Dr. Stevens to come out.

The doctor was surprised at the immense crowd which greeted him as he came down the steps and took Mr. Darrell's hand, but he concealed his astonishment, and asked why he was summoned.

"Dr. Stevens," was the clearly uttered reply, "I have known you for many years, and I believe you are a truthful man. If you think you have a right to do so, I want you to answer me one question. Has George Clarkson, who is ill within there, said to any one, or implied, to your knowledge, that I am the person who assaulted him?"

Before the medical man could reply, Mr. Barnett stepped forward.

"I object, doctor, to your answering that. The reason I object is because it may interfere with the course of justice."

Darrell turned sharply on the man.

"If you interrupt me again, sir, I will treat you as a meddler deserves to be treated."

"You are aware. I hope," said Mr. Barnett, ner-

vously, "that you are threatening an officer who is in the discharge of his duty."

"I am aware of nothing of the kind," was the reply. "You arrested me this morning in Boston, as I believe, with a lie in your mouth. I am now out on bail, and you cannot touch me. At this moment you are no longer an officer in the discharge of his duty. You are a loafer and a tramp, and I warn you once more not to interfere in my affairs. Dr. Stevens," he continued, "if you think you ought not to answer my question, I shall not press it. But if you can, it may relieve me of an unjust stigma, which the press of several States have cast upon me."

"I see no reason," responded the doctor, cordially, "why I should not reply to what you ask. Mr. Clarkson did not recover consciousness until about ten o'clock this morning, and since then he has not mentioned your name."

"There is no equivocation in your answer?"

"None whatever."

"I thank you."

Darrell strode to where Mr. Barnett stood on the edge of the crowd, and looked him in the face.

"Under what pretense did you get a judge to issue that warrant for my arrest?" he demanded. "Before to-morrow night I will put an attachment on every piece of property that you own! I assure you, sir, I shall probe this affair to the bottom!"

Dr. Stevens, who had re-entered the house, came back and whispered something in his ear.

"Your wife wants me to say that you are welcome to come in if you wish."

"Tell her I do not care to," he replied, curtly, taking Mr. Arnold by the arm, and walking off with him in the direction of the hotel.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNSEALED LETTER.

In making this response Darrell had no intention of wounding the feelings of his wife, and certainly none of conveying any such impression to the man of medicine. He was not thinking of Anna, or of what she said, or of the projected divorce. He was thinking only of Barnett, and it made him very ill-tempered.

"I am glad you did not go in," said Lawyer Arnold, when he heard the nature of the doctor's request. "They might accuse you and your wife of collusion. You are, after all, only out on bail, you know. There is a case pending against you. I am sorry you had those words with the officer. They will sound badly when repeated."

Darrell fumed furiously.

"Good heavens! What icebergs you lawyers are!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I can be insulted in this manner—arrested, ironed, imprisoned, posted all over the country as a murderer, have all my family affairs discussed in the newspapers—and keep as cool as a snow bank? I haven't killed any one yet, but I fear I shall if I am driven much further."

At which the lawyer shrugged his shoulders, and looked down on his client again, from the height of his thirty years of practice.

The next morning Clarkson had improved so much that the doctor felt no hesitation in allowing

Mr. Arnold to see him, but when the injured man found what was wanted he refused positively to make anything in the way of an affidavit.

"The only object that I have," said the lawyer to him, "is to relieve your friend, Mr. Darrell, of an unpleasant suspicion, under which he is laboring. He has been arrested for this crime and held to answer. His reputation is of some value to him, as you may imagine, and you can easily clear away everything."

Clarkson consulted with the doctor a moment before he replied :

"I have a natural disinclination to legal proceedings of any sort," he said, finally. "I would not take an oath, because to me it has no sanctity ; but I can meet your wishes in a more direct way. You may invite into this room any officials whom you please, Mr. Darrell himself, if he likes to come, and the newspaper reporters. I will answer any questions that may be put to me in regard to this matter, in the presence of them all."

It was not the regular legal way to do the thing, but Mr. Arnold was wise enough to see that it was the best he could get, and he immediately assented to the proposition. He went out and engaged one of the newspaper man, who was a phonographic reporter, to take notes of the subsequent proceedings, and to submit them in writing as soon as possible, with an affidavit of their correctness. Then he went to see Darrell, who approved of what he was doing, but declined to be present, and half an hour later he had gathered a company of over a dozen people in the sick-chamber, ready to begin his proceedings.

"It is Mr. Clarkson's desire," explained Dr.

Stevens, "to make his statement as explicit as possible, but as he is still weak, I cannot allow any unnecessary circumlocution. Mr. Arnold, will you put your questions as concisely as you can?"

The lawyer hemmed, and the reporters held their pencils ready.

"Your name is George Clarkson?" began Mr. Arnold.

The injured man smiled faintly and responded in the affirmative.

"How did you come to be in your present condition?"

"I was assaulted in front of Mr. Darrell's residence."

"Was the assault committed by Mr. Darrell?"

"I think not, sir."

There was a slight sensation in the room, and many eyes were turned on Officer Barnett, who lost color and shook his head as if incredulous.

"Had Mr. Darrell, as far as you know or believe, anything whatever to do with the assault?"

"No, sir."

"That is all that I care to ask," said Mr. Arnold. "I appear here only as counsel for Mr. Darrell."

Sheriff Dickenson then spoke :

"Will you tell us who did assault you?" he asked, with the air of one who would now show that his judgment was substantiated.

Clarkson smiled again.

"That would be impossible, sir," he replied.

The sheriff was much disconcerted.

"Impossible !" he echoed. "Why?"

"Because I do not know."

The sensation this time was most pronounced. Officers stared blankly at reporters, and reporters

stared at each other. Was all their week's work to go for naught?

"You—do—not—know!" repeated Mr. Dickenson. "Did you not see Harold Mordaunt that night?"

"Yes, when I approached the house with my friend Darrell I saw him—Mr. Mordaunt, or Mr. Allen, whichever his name is. For reasons which I need not divulge I remained in the background and the others entered the house together. I was assaulted while waiting outside."

Dickenson was a disappointed man, but he held on to the last.

"Did you see Mr. Mordaunt come out?"

"Yes," smiled the witness, finding much amusement in the anxiety that was depicted on the sheriff's face. He hated all officers of the law, as a matter of principle. "I saw him come out and walk away."

"Did you speak to him or he to you?"

"Not a word."

"Did he see you?"

"I cannot say."

"How can you be positive that he was not the man that assaulted you?"

"I have not said I was positive of it. I only say I do not know."

"Ah! Then it might have been Mordaunt?" said the sheriff, brightening.

"Yes; or Dr. Stevens; or you."

The exultant expression fled.

"What do you know about it?" asked Dickenson, fretfully.

"I know that I was standing a little way from Mr. Darrell's gate, among the trees by the roadside, and

I know that some time after I found myself lying in this bed. That is all."

Dickenson withdrew at this, and Officer Barnett thought he would try again.

"You could not swear it was not Mr. Darrell?" said he.

Clarkson delighted at the discomfiture of any minion of the law.

"I could only swear—if I chose to swear at all, which I do not—that Mr. Darrell had gone into the house, and seemed to be still there; that Mr. Mordaunt had gone in and come out, and that I appeared to be alone."

"And you saw no other person?"

"None. Now gentlemen, if you were to interrogate me for a week I could tell you no more, and I must wish you all good-morning."

The next day, in his Adirondack retreat, Mordaunt read this interview from the official report, in a copy of the *New York Times*, and was intensely surprised. He could not tell what to make of it. On its face it seemed a very noble thing in Clarkson, but it had a suspicious quality, not like the sound of true metal. It was not easy to ascribe nobility to a man who had deliberately attacked the character of a woman like Anna Darrell. Perhaps it was a ruse to tempt him out of cover, when other and positive evidence would be presented. For all Mordaunt knew, some third party—perhaps Jason himself—had witnessed the assault. He decided to remain quiet for the present.

It may not seem the part of a hero to hide himself when he is wanted to answer to a charge of which he is undoubtedly guilty, but Harold Mor-

daunt had never claimed to be a hero, and there was nothing attractive in the prospect of an arraignment in court or a term in prison. A fishing-rod and a boat in the lakes of the hills suited him better at that season. He wrote to an attorney in Boston whom he knew—a Mr. Wallace—asking him to look into the matter and ascertain whether it was safe for him to appear and give bail. Mr. Wallace took the letter to Auburn and at once placed himself in communication with Landlord Upham, to whom he showed his credentials. The wary landlord, however, counselled patience, and thus a week went by.

During that week Clarkson had abundant leisure for thought. He saw no one except his nurse, the doctor, and Mrs. Darrell, and made rapid progress toward recovery. Darrell sent a message to him by Dr. Stevens, saying that his attorney believed it wiser for him not to enter the house, but that he would do anything else for his comfort that might be suggested. But there was nothing that any one could do for him that was not being done. His sole desire was to reach Boston and see Miss Casson again. He hungered and thirsted for one bright glance from her eyes, one tender smile that should tell him that what he had done was appreciated.

As soon as he could sit up, a pen and ink were furnished him, with the caution not to tire himself. He wrote—to whom else could he write?—to *her*. Every word breathed the fullness of his devotion, the resistless passion of his love!

"I have obeyed you," he said, "in every respect. He believes her guilty and nothing will convince him to the contrary. Mordaunt, who assaulted me, as you have probably read in the paper, fled, and I

could have had him severely punished ; but what was my revenge to yours ? I have made a public statement that I do not know my assailant, for I knew that in case he was arrested he might not be available when the time comes that you need him. I could not consult with you, but I have tried to do as you would wish. Think of my situation here, under her roof, ministered to by her very hands ! I have had to stifle every feeling but the one of loyalty to you. Never before did man feel such love for woman. I would be true to my promises though they carried me through the gates of the Inferno. In a few days I shall be able to travel, and then it will be only a question of hours when I shall be at your side !”

He had just strength enough to superscribe the envelope and affix the stamp, when he sank back on his pillow exhausted.

Dr. Stevens took the letter to mail, and, as he was leaving the house, stopped to talk a moment with Mrs. Darrell.

“Our patient is improving fast,” he said. “See, he has just written a letter.”

She never knew what induced her to ask the question—it seemed so totally unnatural : “To some of his relations ?”

“No.” He held it up to her. “To some lady friend. Perhaps a sweetheart.”

There are moments when each of us is surprised at his own mental strength. Anna read the name on that envelope, and recognized it as that of the woman of whom her Aunt Burton had told her—the woman who had kept Edmund from her for nearly the whole of his married life. But she did not start, or turn pale.

"I am going to the post-office," she said, quietly, "and I can put it in the box. It will save you leaving your carriage."

He thanked her and placed the letter in her hand. Then he drove away, and, after seeing that he was out of sight, she re-entered the house, went to her chamber, locked the door, drew the blinds, and sat down with the missive on the table before her. She read the name and address again, though the letters danced before her eyes. She turned the envelope over.

It was not sealed!

In his weakness Clarkson had neglected this important act, though Anna, in her present mood, would have opened that letter if it had required a cold chisel to do it. But when she saw it lying before her, without even this expected barrier to an inspection of its contents, she was startled. The meanness of reading private correspondence touched her. She dreaded to do the thing she had resolved upon. Had anything less important been at stake, she would have sealed the letter and sent it on its way. No pecuniary interest, hardly the question of her own life or death, would have tempted her. But her reputation was in the scale, and everything must give way before the exigency.

She thought there might be some word here, some hint, that would show whether her husband's relations with this woman were what her aunt had claimed. She never dreamed of the discovery she was about to make; and when she had read the letter, and realized the plot of which she had been the victim, her indignation was roused to the highest pitch.

"I will go with it in my hand and ask him what

he means !” was her instant resolve. “So this Clarkson is the serpent that has coiled himself around us ! This creature that I have nursed back to life would rob me of all I hold dear on earth ! He shall explain it to me ! He shall know that I have discovered his villainy ; and then, sick or well, out of my house he shall go.”

She threw open the door of her room and was about to descend the stairs, when she heard the voices of her children calling her. After turning back to attend to their little requests, she went again into her chamber and sat down to think. Her excitement had had time to lessen in a measure, and she tried to consider which was the wisest course to take. The final result of her deliberations was that she put on her bonnet and went down to the office of the village lawyer, Mr. Jacobs.

He was the same lawyer who had drawn up Ephraim Burton's latest will, and he knew most of the secrets of the Darrell household, as he did of all the other households within half a dozen miles. He could have recognized each individual skeleton in all the closets of Auburn and vicinity, had his knowledge been put to the test, and labelled it with its correct name. Before Mrs. Darrell had spoken twenty words, he interrupted her to say that he knew all about her disagreement with her husband, and that she might confine herself to the latest phase of the case. At that she showed him the letter, and when he had read it his professional and physical eyes opened very wide indeed.

“This was written by the man who is lying sick in your house ?” he said.

She assented.

“How did you get it ?”

She told him.

"It is a serious matter, opening a letter that is ready to mail," said he. "You have laid yourself liable to imprisonment."

"It was unsealed," she replied, evincing no fear at this dire announcement.

"Umph!" responded Mr. Jacobs. "Well, what do you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to tell me what *I* am to do," she replied, with slight impatience.

"You want to retain me. Is that it?"

"Why, yes. I suppose so."

"Twenty-five dollars, please."

She counted out the money. She had known Lawyer Jacobs for a long time, and his blunt ways were no surprise to her.

"Do you want a divorce?" he asked, when he had the bills stowed safely away in his pocket.

"I am sure there will have to be a separation," she faltered. "I could never live with him again."

"He is willing, is he not?" was the next question.

"Yes." She hesitated. "But he accuses me of—of all sorts of crimes; and we must show him that he has been deceived by this man."

"How can we show him that?"

"Why, by this letter. He will understand at once that there has been a conspiracy between those people."

The lawyer shook his head.

"We can't show him that letter," he said. "It must be mailed to-night. You can make a copy of it, if you are willing to run the risk, and will keep it under lock and key. I don't advise it, mind. It is a dangerous thing to do. Is your husband still in Auburn?"

"I think so. I understand that he is still stopping at the Auburn House."

"I will see him. If he is at all inclined to be sensible, I think I can make that letter of use. You may make a copy—on your own responsibility—but you must never show it to a living soul unless I give you leave. Whatever you do, mail it to-night—unsealed, just as it is—in time for the evening train, or my plans will go for nothing."

Mr. Jacobs sat and thought for nearly an hour after his fair client had disappeared. It was a favorite proverb of his that a man who has two hours in which to do a thing should spend the first one in deciding how to use the second to advantage. After satisfying himself about the course he had decided to take, he wrote a brief note to Mr. Darrell, asking him to call at his office and to bring his attorney with him, if Mr. Arnold was at hand. Darrell, who was lounging away the afternoon in his very dull fashion at the hotel, was thankful for anything to vary the monotony. Though he had no idea what Jacobs wanted, he summoned Mr. Arnold, and together they walked down to see the lawyer.

CHAPTER XX.

"I REPRESENT YOUR WIFE."

"I represent your wife," was the unvarnished statement of Mr. Jacobs, as soon as he had welcomed his visitor and gone through the ceremony of introduction to Mr. Arnold.

There is something disagreeable to any man in meeting for the first time a legal gentleman who is empowered to use this phrase, and Edmund Darrell felt a chill creeping through his bones.

"I represent your wife," repeated Mr. Jacobs, and Darrell winced again. "I understand that you intend to obtain a divorce from her, if you can, on a certain allegation which you propose to bring. Now I think you would dislike to accuse her of anything of which she is not guilty; in other words, that you are not vindictive in the matter. I think I am able to show you by satisfactory evidence that you have been deceived by a designing person."

Mr. Arnold put in a word.

"When do you intend to give us your reasons for this extraordinary assertion, Mr. Jacobs?"

Mr. Jacobs replied that he proposed, if Mr. Darrell desired it, to put him in the way of proving that his assertions were true within fifteen hours.

"Before I say what I will or will not do," Mr. Darrell interposed, "I must remind you that my wife has also made accusations against me. I would like to inquire if she is willing to withdraw them?"

"If they can be shown to be as groundless as yours are against her," said Mr. Jacobs, "I may safely say they will be abandoned at once."

Darrell bridled at the "if." But he assured Mr. Jacobs that it had been his full intention when he came to Auburn to allow his wife a separation, with complete honor to her name ; and he added that he should still prefer his original plan, which he briefly outlined, as he had given it to Mordaunt.

"There will be a good deal less trouble in the world," put in Mr. Arnold, "when people learn to intrust their business affairs to men of the law. If you had come to me in the first place, Mr. Darrell, and sent me to see your wife, amicable arrangements could have been made, and all unpleasantness avoided."

To this view Mr. Jacobs warmly assented, as no doubt Mr. Wallace would have done, had the third counsel in the case been present ; and all the other members of the Massachusetts bar, for that matter.

"What is it that you want me to do?" Darrell asked. "You said something about a conspiracy."

"I did," responded Mr. Jacobs impressively. "Are you prepared to undergo a great shock to your feelings—to find that one in whom you have placed implicit confidence has set deliberately about your ruin? I think I can put into your own hands the means of unveiling a plot of which you are the victim. It will require nerve and courage on your part, but if you will agree to play the cards according to my instruction, the game is in your hands."

Darrell listened incredulously, but he told the lawyer to state his proposition.

"You must go to Boston to-night on the late train, and take a cab quietly to your residence, seeing

nobody. In the morning, as early as half-past eight o'clock, you must make a call on your friend, Miss C."

A sudden start betrayed the surprise of the hearer. He essayed to speak, but suppressed the inclination.

"Go on, sir," he said.

"I want you to see your friend before she has opened her morning mail, in which, if I do not mistake, there will be a letter post-marked 'Auburn.' You must possess yourself of the contents of that letter."

Mr. Jacobs paused, and Darrell met his eye with an ironical smile.

"A truly ingenious plan," he said. "But before I agree to do an act which appears on its face the most contemptible in the world, will you tell me what I am to expect to find in this mysterious communication?"

The lawyer sat back in his chair and toyed with a pencil that lay on the table.

"Possibly that your supposed friends are your worst enemies, and your supposed enemies your best friends," he replied, slowly. "It is not for me to say. You have been married for nine years to one of the loveliest girls in Auburn. If you prefer to believe her guilty of that from which her soul would revolt, you will neglect this opportunity to prove her innocence."

"Do you charge Miss—Miss C.—with being one of the conspirators against me?" he demanded.

"I charge no one with anything. By an accident I am in a position to give you this advice. Follow it or not as you please. If you get possession of that letter, do not part with it."

Mr. Arnold, who had looked on with a somewhat sour countenance, now interrupted.

"Do you advise my client to steal that letter?"

Mr. Jacobs smiled.

"I should have no hesitation in advising a man to commit a little crime when it will prevent a great one," he replied. "The letter in question will probably be unsealed. Mr. Darrell will be able to read it before he decides whether it is worth carrying away."

Darrell could not help a growing distrust of Mr. Jacobs, whose story seemed to him quite absurd. How could he possibly know so well the contents of a compromising letter, and even whether it was or was not in a sealed envelope.

"Have you anything more to say?" he asked, rising.

"Nothing," was the response. "Shall you follow my suggestion?"

"We will consider that subject together," said Mr. Arnold, pompously. "Mr. Darrell will remember, I trust, that you are his wife's counsel, not his. We wish you good-day, sir."

On the way back to the Auburn House the extraordinary proposition was discussed at length, and both men found themselves quite in agreement about it. They feared that there was a trap of some sort involved in the affair, and thought it would be the part of discretion to let it alone. But as the day wore away, Darrell grew more and more uneasy in his mind. If there was really a scheme to deceive him—and especially if Miss Casson was in any way concerned—he wanted to know it. As the hour approached when the evening train was due, he could bear the suspense no longer. He suddenly

burst into Mr. Arnold's room with the announcement that he had decided to go to Boston. It happened, very oddly, that the same form of reasoning had been going on in the mind of the attorney, who, however, disliked to be the first to state his change of opinion, and after a moment's consultation, they decided to go together.

"If you are determined to do this, I may as well accompany you," said Mr. Arnold, wishing to make it out a violation of his advice in case anything went wrong. "If there is such a letter as has been described, and you should get hold of it, I ought to see it as soon as possible."

Edmund Darrell was not accustomed to lying awake much in bed, but he got very little sleep that night. As soon as daylight appeared, he rose and ate a slight breakfast, after which he strolled across the Common to kill the interminable hours. He had made up his mind, at whatever sacrifice of his feelings, to possess that letter from Auburn, if it was in Miss Casson's mail. He concluded that the easiest method was to intercept the post-man on his early delivery.

The letter-carrier knew him well, and the plan worked to perfection.

"If you have anything for Miss Casson, I will take it, as I am going directly there," he said, and half a dozen letters, besides newspapers and magazines, were unhesitatingly handed to him. As soon as the post-man disappeared into an adjacent store, Darrell glanced hurriedly at the letters. Yes! An unsealed envelope post-marked "Auburn," was among the number.

He hesitated no longer. Though his fingers trembled, he took out the note and began to read it.

He looked first for the signature, and his heart beat violently as he proceeded with the epistle itself.

"I have obeyed you—He believes her guilty—What was my revenge to yours?—I have tried to do as you would wish—Think of my situation under her roof—Never before did man feel such love for woman?"

The reader's eyes grew misty. The revelation was too horrible! If what it implied were true, all faith was dead on earth!

He tried very hard to be cool. His task was only begun. This letter might be a forgery. There was but one way to prove its genuineness. He must sit in the room when she read it, and mark her face and attitude.

Mechanically he returned the letter to the envelope and this time he sealed it. He would leave nothing to excite her suspicions. He put all of the mail in his pocket, and rang the bell. The maid who admitted him looked surprised at his early call, but as she showed him into the "Editorial room," at his request, he explained that he had just arrived in town. He said he was in no hurry; that he would sit there and read the morning papers till Miss Casson was ready to see him. As soon as the girl left the room, he placed the mail carelessly on the desk, and taking up a morning *Herald* began to read.

She came in half an hour—it seemed a month—and asked him to go in to breakfast with her. When he said that he had already breakfasted, she suggested that he bring his paper in and keep her company. But he declined on the plea that he would only delay her, and that he was absorbed in a long

article on the tariff, of which he had in reality only read the head-lines.

Miss Casson saw that he was troubled about something, but knowing much of what had passed at Auburn, she was not surprised. After taking her breakfast she returned to him, and, as he seemed still engrossed in the newspaper, she asked leave to open her mail, to which he assented by a nod. Taking up her letters she inspected them one by one, and laid them down again, until that from Auburn was reached, when she divided the envelope with her paper-cutter and plunged into its contents.

The expression of her face, which he watched narrowly, changed several times as she read, and at the close she could not repress an exclamation of impatience. Darrell turned at the sound.

"Bad news?" he asked, laconically.

"No," she replied, slightly confused. "And yet, not wholly pleasing."

"A business matter?" he asked again, rising from his chair and stretching himself.

"No; it is from a friend merely. It is of no special consequence."

His eye rested on the envelope, and he simulated surprise.

"Why, it's from Auburn!"

She could not prevent him taking it up without exciting greater suspicion, but it was with much uneasiness that she saw it in his hand.

"Yes, I have a friend who is staying there for a little while," she said.

He forced a laugh.

"Oh, I know the writing," he responded. "Why didn't you tell me at once it was from Clarkson?"

He stood in front of her and she tried hard to laugh,

too. But she was more frightened than she had ever been in her life.

"Well, it is from him," she assented. "I should have told you in a minute more, but I didn't like to encourage such a feminine trait in you as over-curiosity."

He kept up the pretense of a smile, and asked her what Clarkson had to say.

"He is at my house, you know," he said. "Or rather, I ought to put it, at my wife's."

"Yes. There are only a few words. He is hardly able to hold a pen, but he says he is improving and expects to be out soon."

He pretended to turn away, as if to resume his chair. Then, with a quick motion, he snatched the letter from her hands.

"I don't believe that's all," he said, holding it away from her in his left hand, and still pretending gaiety. "I believe he is making love to you. I am jealous, and I shall read it for myself."

Her agitation was now extreme. She rose to her feet and made several vain attempts to reach the letter, which he held far above her head. But she was no match for his greater size and strength, and in a moment she took a new tack.

"Mr. Darrell," she said, frigidly, "I want that letter. If you do not give it to me at once all friendship ceases between us."

His face grew very grave.

"It must contain some momentous secret," he replied, "when it leads you to say a thing like that."

"By no means," she answered. "I am contending for a principle. You have no right to read my private correspondence, even if it were only a bill from my baker."

Darrell was convinced by this time that Lawyer Jacobs had known what he was about, and he had no scruples now about pursuing this matter to the end.

"If I read this letter, I understand we are to be no longer friends," he said.

"I have said it and I mean it," replied Miss Casson "Will you cease this levity and give it to me?"

"Not after that statement. I am not a good man to threaten. I shall read it."

His voice had grown stern, and she knew that further persuasions were useless. Her quick brain set at work to parry the effect of the storm that must ensue. Her manner changed instantly, and she burst into a wild laugh.

"Read it, by all means!" she cried, with affected jocularly. "Read it and make out what it is, if you can, for it's all Greek to me. The blow that Mr. Clarkson received has evidently unsettled his never too strong brain."

Darrell glanced over the letter. He had no need to read it again, for every word was burned into his memory. When he looked up his face was very dark.

"You don't understand this?" said he.

"Not at all."

"Well, I will explain it to you. This man Clarkson, led on by your suggestions and advice, has been lying about my wife."

The queen-like air that all of Laura Casson's circle knew so well came back to her.

"Do you believe that?" she asked, imperiously.

"I do."

"And on that evidence?" She pointed to the letter.

"On that evidence," he replied.

She looked him full in the face.

"You can say this to me, because I am a woman ! If I were a man you would not dare. Edmund Darrell, I have been mistaken in you ! Some day I will force you to admit that you have slandered me !"

The eyes that beamed upon him filled with sudden tears, and he did not know what to say.

"This man Clarkson has forced his love upon me all the summer," she went on, rapidly. "I have done everything I could, short of actual insult, to discourage him, for until this hour I believed my heart wholly the property of another man. When he came here and told of his discoveries at Auburn, I thought it only my duty to introduce him to you. The blow he has had has unsettled his reason beyond doubt. He says in this letter that Mr. Mor-daunt was his assailant, though he has given a contrary statement to the press. He now seems to be laboring under the delusion that your wife, because she has treated him kindly, is innocent of the crimes which he formerly imputed to her. He is an unfortunate fellow whose maunderings may deserve your pity, but certainly not your credence. You have believed him in preference to me. Let it be so."

Quite confused, Darrell somehow found his hat and cane, and left the house with a consciousness that his head was in a whirl.

But the letter that Clarkson wrote was still tightly grasped in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I AM A WICKED WOMAN."

Quite unconscious of the catastrophe that he had precipitated, George Clarkson convalesced at the Darrell homestead. Dr. Stevens finally said that he could leave in a week, information which Mrs. Darrell received in silence. Since she had been made aware of the perfidy of her guest she had never entered his room. She could not trust herself to speak to him, for she had a nature that was wholly a stranger to pretense. The first outburst of indignation, under which she had resolved to order him forth at once, gave way to a more reasonable frame of mind. As a sick man, he should have the hospitalities of her house as long as he needed them. As an individual he was wholly repugnant to her, and she could not do her feelings the violence to come again into his presence.

He noticed that he saw her no more, but he had no reason to suspect the cause, and consequently gave the matter little thought. What troubled him most was that he received no answer to the letter he had sent Miss Casson. He gave himself a thousand fears, which did much to retard his recovery. Ten lines from her, thanking him for what he had done, or suggesting something else that he might do, would have abundantly repaid him for those weary days. He had no one in whom he could confide. There was nothing to do but wait. The fortnight which he passed in the house seemed endless, but at

last a day came when he was allowed to be assisted into a carriage—for he was still weak—and be driven to the railway station, where he was placed in a compartment of a Pullman, engaged for him in advance. He took along the nurse who had attended him, and as the train sped towards Boston, he felt a new animation stirring in his veins.

None of his relations had taken the pains to visit him, though a cousin had written a few perfunctory expressions of regret at his "accident." Clarkson was not a favorite in his family. His unorthodox views had made a breach between him and the others that time had only sufficed to widen. There was no warmer welcome awaiting him at Boston than that of his landlady, whose interest in him would have ceased abruptly had the price of her rooms not been forthcoming. Except for the presence in the Hub of the Universe of one person, he would as lief have been journeying toward any other city in the world. To meet Laura Casson—that was the hope, the joy, the fruition of all things! And yet, why had she not written and answered his letter?

That evening he sent her another passionate note, written with all the ardor that was in his heart, and begging her to appoint the earliest possible hour for their meeting. He excused her in advance for neglecting the reply to the other letter, but conjured her not to keep him longer in suspense. In response to this his messenger brought a card marked simply, "Friday evening, nine o'clock." He could not understand the laconic quality of the answer, nor the reason for the three days' delay which it necessitated; but he tried to content himself with the prospect, and improved so rapidly as the time approached that he

had no hesitation in making the visit without taking his attendant with him.

Bidding his driver remain until his call was finished, he walked, leaning on his cane, up the steps of Miss Casson's residence. Once in the parlor, he could hardly restrain himself in the joy of anticipation. He waited with excited nerves for the advent of the woman he loved—ay, worshipped!—above all else on earth. When at last the door opened and she appeared, he rose and took a step toward her, with an exclamation of pleasure on his lips. But as he caught a glimpse of her face, the cry of joy was stifled. He stood riveted to the spot, unable to proceed, to retreat, or to speak a word.

That quick look at Laura Casson's face had shown him in one second that there could be nothing more between them. Why, he knew not. But it was beyond all doubt.

"You have done me the honor to call," she said, with bitter irony. "Proceed with your business."

In his weak condition he could not remain standing any longer, and he sank again into his chair.

"I have been very sick," he articulated, feebly.

"You should have died!" she answered, harshly.

"Yes, that night you were assaulted, before you had time to blast the lives of others!"

He felt that it could do him no good—he knew that all he could say would be useless—but he had a great longing to know what had caused this.

"Whoever I may have harmed, Miss Casson," he said, "I have been true to you."

"You have ruined me!" she cried. "You have acted the part of an imbecile! The only man in this world who is worthy of a moment's thought, has been torn from me by your asininity!"

His brain reeled. She was beside herself with rage. "The only man!" What could she mean?

"One of us is certainly insane," said he, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I do not know what you are talking about."

She stood looking down on him, as if he were some creeping thing that she disdained to crush with her heel.

"You wrote me that idiotic letter, did you not? And Edmund Darrell read it! What could I say to him in explanation? You had not veiled anything! It was all as plain as the noonday sun. He believes me guilty of plotting to destroy the fair fame of his wife!"

Clarkson stared at her like one stricken with madness.

"Believes you!" he echoed. "And you have not done it—is that your meaning?"

"Never! I did not tell you to invent lies! All I asked you to do was to watch. Your letter made it seem to him that I had been your partner in a conspiracy. It was infamous in you to write it, with all the dangers to which correspondence is subject! It destroyed my only hope, my only joy in existence!"

He heard, but he could not believe his senses.

"You—you loved him!"

"*Loved him!*" She repeated the word with a deep groan of anguish. "Loved him! I worshipped the trees under which he walked! I would have kissed the soil his shoes had pressed! And now he is gone from me forever"

He was too stunned to rise to the angry mood that would have been natural to him.

"I want to understand," he ventured, in a trembling voice. "What was it you wished? Surely my

only desire was to do as you would have me. I thought—I thought—"

She interrupted him sharply.

"You thought! How could I help what you thought! You thought, no doubt, that after he had got free from his wife, that would widen the breach between him and me!"

He saw for the first time the trap into which she had planned to lead him.

"You made a pitfall for me and have fallen into it yourself," he said, gently. "But, though I cannot comprehend the reason, I feel no vindictiveness toward you. I would serve you now as willingly as ever, if I knew the way."

She heard him with profound surprise. She had expected a terrible exhibition of wrath to match her own.

"You would serve me?" she echoed.

"Yes," he said eagerly, "with my life! You do not love me. That knowledge makes my future a blank. I placed all my hopes on your love. Now nothing is left. Tell me anything I can do to make you happier and it shall be done."

Miss Casson studied the face before her, into which a new brightness had come. It was a revelation of the heights to which self-sacrifice can rise.

"Bring Edmund Darrell back to me," she said. "Convince him that he has wronged me in his thoughts. Make him what he was before. There is nothing else you can do for me."

He heard her impassively.

"How shall I accomplish this?"

"You never can accomplish it!" she groaned. "But you can tell him that you wrote that letter while your brain was affected. You can swear to

him that the insinuations which it contains against me are unfounded."

"And—and the wife?"

He waited like a slave for her orders. She hesitated for a long time.

"What you saw," she said, finally—"you saw."

"Laura," said Clarkson, dropping unconsciously into the use of her first name, "we misunderstood each other the last time. Let us not do it again. I saw—*nothing*."

She walked to a window that was partially open, and shut it.

"You were going to swear to something in the divorce court," she said, when she returned.

"If I had thought it would have pleased you," he replied, fixing his swollen eyes upon her, "I would have sworn that I saw her commit murder."

His dog-like submissiveness impressed her powerfully, but she did not dare to trust his judgment again.

"You have spoiled everything by that miserable letter!" she answered. "A divorce is now out of the question. All that you can do is to write to him taking the blame from me; and then—and then—you can—disappear."

Clarkson waited a moment.

"Do you mean *die*?" he asked. "If you do, say so."

She uttered a little cry of terror.

"No, no! I only mean that you should go away, where you cannot be found for a number of months. Go across the sea, to some place where you will not be likely to meet people who know you."

He bowed submissively.

"I will do it. Is there anything more?"

"That is all," she said, thoughtfully. "Except, for as you say we must have no misunderstandings now, there is to be no 'reward' thought of this time."

"I know," he replied.

"I can never love you."

"I am sure of that," he answered. "As sure as I am that I shall love *you* as long as I draw breath."

No human being could have helped being moved by the plaintiveness of his voice and the depth of his devotion. Miss Casson found herself stammering a request that he would forgive her for the epithets she had used.

"There is no reason why I should forgive you," he replied. "You love. I, who also love, understand all that you felt when you thought your lover lost. If I can return him to you I will, and then—I will go—far away."

Something in the dreamy tone with which he uttered this alarmed her.

"You will not think of anything like—like suicide?" she said, uneasily. "I should feel as if it were my fault. Promise me not to do that."

He rose, leaning on his cane.

"I will live—if I can," he said, slowly. "But I should prefer it the other way. Since it is your wish, I will try to live. I shall go to Europe at first. My address will be at Baring Brothers. There may be something I can do for you again. If there is, you have only to write."

He walked cautiously toward the door, and Miss Casson followed him, wondering at the change that had come over her. When he turned at the threshold, and was about to say good-bye, she bent her forehead for him to kiss.

"I am very sorry for you," she said, tremulously, as she raised her eyes again. "I am a very wicked woman, and I have treated you cruelly."

"Do not say that," he answered, speaking with difficulty. "You are not wicked—you are only in love. It was kind of you to give me that kiss. I shall not forget it."

He went his way, and the unhappy woman threw herself on the floor and wept convulsively.

Before Clarkson slept that night he wrote for a long time. He wanted to send a letter to Darrell that would be the most effective possible, and he put the things he had to say into many forms before they satisfied him. This is what he finally sent :

"MY DEAR DARRELL :

"Though somewhat recovered physically from the injuries I received in Auburn, I find that there has been a mental shock which it will take a much longer time to cure. My brain frequently wanders, and I find myself harboring hallucinations. During my illness at your house I must have done some strange things. This evening I met our mutual friend, Miss Casson, who told me I had written her a letter in which it was implied that she and I had combined to injure a member of your family by false reports. Nothing could be farther from the truth. If I wrote anything like that, it was certainly when I was temporarily deranged. All that I told you was true, and I am sure Miss Casson had no unworthy motive in asking me to bring so serious a matter to your attention. I also find that I am reported in the papers as saying that I did not know who my assailant was, when quite contrary is the fact. Act-

ing under the advice of my physician I shall start at once for a distant place, where I hope to wholly recover from my disabilities. To go into court or to be troubled about any similar matter might be very injurious and I do not dare to risk it. I think I am writing this in one of my lucid moments, and I hope if, in my madness, I have done any one harm, this explanation will undo it.

“Your friend,

“GEO. CLARKSON.”

CHAPTER XXII.

MORDAUNT RETURNS TO AUBURN.

When Darrell left Miss Casson's house with Clarkson's letter, he went straight, as in duty bound, to Mr. Arnold's office. The lawyer read it over and was forced to admit that it was a very suspicious looking document.

“You wouldn't get very far toward a divorce with that in the hands of the court,” he remarked, sententiously. “But how are we to know where these plots and counterplots begin and end? All that glitters is not gold, Mr. Darrell. I can see a dozen possibilities about this letter beside the one that appears on its face.”

Darrell's brows contracted as he inquired what the lawyer meant by that.

“Well, let us look at it for a minute. How did you come to the knowledge that this letter was—

might be, we will say—in existence? From your wife's attorney. People do not often expect the fairest of advice from the counsel of their opponent in a case. It was natural that I should suspect the motives of Mr. What's-His-Name—Mr. Jacobs—but I thought there could be no harm in seeing what card he was playing, so I consented to come to Boston and go through this performance. As he told us, there was a letter, and we have it in our hands, though I must admit not by a strictly legal method. I have read the letter, and it looks very bad for Miss Casson and very favorable for your wife. But that does not prove in the least that it is a genuine document."

"For heaven's sake tell me what you are driving at!" exclaimed Darrell. "And do it without any unnecessary delay."

Mr. Arnold smiled quietly, with the air that a man should have who looks back on thirty years of practice at the bar.

"Softly, Mr. Darrell, softly. I must choose my words and my manner of speech, in order to put this matter before you as I think it requires. We must look at several theories, and a hypothetical case will illustrate one of them, perhaps, better than anything else. Supposing that this Clarkson wished to clear your wife of suspicion, could he have taken a better way? Why should he wish it, you will ask. Why, he has lain for a fortnight in her house, attended by her and her servants. Gratitude may have overcome every other feeling. Indeed, sir, something much stronger than gratitude may have developed in his breast during those trying days."

The listener drew a breath of pain. Was this lawyer going to accuse the whole world of falling in

love with a woman whose husband had not been able to develop a passion for her after nine years of married life?

"Do not forget, Mr. Arnold," he said, "that it was on the evidence of this man that I came at first to suspect my wife. He must have a very complicated set of motives, if what you suggest is true."

"Exactly. And so do most men, if you analyze them carefully. Now, tell me all you know about him."

"Very little," was the reluctant admission. "Miss Casson introduced him to me. It was not necessary that I should know him intimately to believe his straightforward story. Men have been hanged, I suppose you know, on the evidence of beggars."

He threw this in as a bit of self-justification, and was rather pleased at its sound.

"But now that you have this letter, which seems to alter the complexion of things so much, what do you propose to do?"

Darrell responded with some impatience that this was exactly what he had come to the lawyer's office to find out.

"You want a divorce," said Mr. Arnold, reflectively. "The question is, how to reach that aim in the easiest and most efficacious manner."

Darrell glanced up quickly.

"Pardon me," he corrected. "I do not want a divorce that is based on the slightest misconception of the main facts at issue. My wife and I are not mated. It is useless to deny that. If she would consent to a severance of the tie that binds us, I should gladly avail myself of it. But while there is the least doubt of the tales I have heard against her, I shall proceed no farther."

The lawyer replied that this was very praiseworthy, and just what he should have expected from a gentleman of Mr. Darrell's high standard of honor, but his disappointment was none the less evident.

"In that view of the case, everything must rest in abeyance for the present," he said. "For, as I understand it, you think the letter you obtained this morning opens up a reasonable doubt."

"Decidedly."

"How would a special detective do?" said Mr. Arnold.

Darrell opened his eyes.

"For what purpose?"

"He could watch."

"My wife, do you mean?"

Mr. Arnold assented.

"Not if it was the last and only resource," was the firm reply. "I will never pay any one to dog her steps. But if one could follow Clarkson—"

The lawyer eyed his client with admiration.

"That's not a bad idea," he said.

So it happened that from the minute that George Clarkson left Auburn, he was shadowed by one of the keenest men that could be found in Boston. When he visited Miss Casson the detective marked the feverish impatience with which he crept from his carriage to her door. When he came forth again, the same lynx-eyes saw his weary look, his still more feeble steps. And when his letter came the next morning, it tallied so completely with the report of the detective that it seemed pervaded with an air of absolute truth. Added to this there soon came the news that Clarkson had bought tickets

for France, and a few days later his sailing was announced.

Mr. Arnold held various conferences with Darrell during these days, but he was, to tell the truth, fully as much troubled as his client. Both of them agreed that divorce proceedings could not longer be thought of on the basis they had taken, and Darrell, tired of the whole affair, worn out with the strain upon him, went back to his counting-room and tried to drive away his mental trouble.

But when the evening came he missed his visits to Miss Casson. Nine years of habit are not easily overcome in a month.

In spite of everything they kept up the mutual direction of the magazine, she sending him articles to read, and he returning them with his comments written on slips of paper affixed. Sometimes brief notes were necessary, but they were always couched in business phrase. Miss Casson was too wise to attempt anything more at present. She hoped time would bring all around right again, and was glad that the periodical gave her an excuse for continuing even the present unsatisfactory relations with him.

Her large circle of acquaintances and followers gossiped interminably over as much of the affair as they had knowledge of. The fact that Darrell had a wife and children was no longer a secret, as the newspapers, which had been full of the Clarkson assault case, had not omitted to give abundant publicity to the most minute circumstances connected with it. That matters between him and his wife were somewhat strained was also apparent. And when there was added to this the fact that he came no more to Miss Casson's receptions, there was a

genuine flutter among the circle that congregated there.

No one, not even Mrs. St. John, with her boasted intimacy, had presumed to ask a question, though they were all, to use their own expression, "dying to know" what was the matter. The general opinion was, of course, favorable to Miss Casson, as her worshippers were quite blind in their devotion to her. Miss Symonds had expressed it perfectly when she had said, in response to Mr. Rossborough's question—

"Suspicion! Of Laura Casson!"

The hostess herself bore the increased scrutiny to which she was subjected with remarkable equanimity. Though quite the paragon of entertainers she had always showed a very quiet manner in public. She was like an actress whose mind is torn by most distressing news, but who must proceed with her part in the play as though nothing unusual has occurred. Her receptions had never been as fully attended as they were that autumn. All the regular comers continued to be present; many who had dropped off took the opportunity of coming again; and not a few new people suddenly discovered that they had long felt an interest in Miss Casson and her theories, and persuaded friends to introduce them.

To all, old and new, she was the same dignified, obliging lady, and the events narrated, instead of injuring her standing as a social power, improved it in a marked degree. Darrell's continued absence was reckoned by most of her friends a point in her favor, as they supposed that his marriage had been hitherto unknown to her.

Harold Mordaunt soon learned through Mr. Wal-

lace, and also from Mr. Upham, that the Grand Jury had failed to indict him. The absence of the party aggrieved in Europe, and the readiness of many witnesses to swear to his statement that he did not know his assailant, made Sheriff Dickenson confess that the case might as well be given up now as later. Officer Barnett suffered for some time from apprehension on account of Darrell's threats to sue him for false arrest ; but when time wore on he began to conclude—which was the fact—that the threat had either been forgotten or the intention given up. Mordaunt went to New York, not caring to return to Boston or Auburn, and passed a listless time there. He wanted very much to see Mrs. Darrell once more, and have a final explanation with her, but he did not see any feasible way. He felt that he ought not to begin a correspondence while she and her husband were talking of a divorce, even if she had given him the right to do so. He knew that she was, in all probability, without a single trustworthy adviser, and yet he feared that a friend like himself would at this time be worse than none at all.

Weeks were passed in these unsatisfactory reflections. He learned from Landlord Upham, in whom he had come to have implicit confidence, that nothing new had transpired concerning the trouble between Darrell and his wife. The husband had not again visited Auburn, and she had never left the place, even for a day. The landlord also wrote that Mrs. Darrell went out much less than usual, and seemed anxious to avoid company. So far as he could learn, she had not made up with her aunt, Miss Burton. An air of impenetrability pervaded the homestead, where she lived with her children, and the four servants had been reduced to one.

During those days Mordaunt tried conscientiously, more than once, to read his heart. He searched diligently, to see if there was a single unworthy thing in the deep affection which he felt for the abandoned wife, but he failed to find it. He would have wished to have her nothing but what she was—loyal, self-sacrificing, good and true. Could there be anything wrong in wanting to make her life brighter? He had given her happier hours in the summer that was past, and who had been the worse? Pacing Broadway, night after night, from Union Square to Fifty-ninth street, he tried to think whether it would be best to go to her, tell her how much she had his sympathy, and proffer his assistance, if there was any way she could accept it.

At last, unable to bear it longer, he decided to go. Having a little business to see to in Boston, he took himself first to that city. On the evening of his arrival, he encountered Mr. Rossborough on Washington street, and through him learned for the first time of the rupture between Darrell and Miss Casson.

Anxious to hear everything possible concerning the affair, he invited Rossborough to dine with him. When the champagne had loosened the tongue of his guest he was put in possession of all the news and gossip that he could retail.

"And what do people say?" he asked, when all the salient points of the narrative had been given.

"Well," said Rossborough, "they say many things. The general opinion is that Miss Casson declined to receive Darrell when she learned that he was married. Clarkson went abroad on account of his injuries, which you remember they at first ascribed to you. Though, of course," he added in a burst of

after-dinner generosity of judgment, "nobody who knew you believed that."

Mordaunt toyed with his wine glass and let Rossborough do most of the talking. But finally he said, feeling that it was necessary—

"Darrell's family claim him now, I suppose?"

"Indeed, no," said his voluble guest. "He hasn't left the city once. I know his superintendent, Mr. Parker. It's a mighty queer affair all round."

That night Mordaunt searched his heart again and found it still innocent of guile; and he determined that the next night should see him in Auburn if he were yet alive.

He wrote to Landlord Upham to meet him with a carriage at Brixton, as he did not wish to set all the talkers in Auburn by the ears. When he reached the station it was dark. Jim Brodie, and not his employer, waited for him, explaining, as they drove away, that Mr. Upham had been called off on other and imperative business. Though grateful to Brodie for the service he had once rendered him, Mordaunt could not be as confidential as he could with the landlord. At first, as they rode along, they exchanged only commonplaces, but after awhile Jim got to talking about the assault case, and grew interesting. He related the entire story of the morning when Mordaunt escaped, and chuckled with glee as he told of the discomfiture of Dickenson and Jason.

Mordaunt grew very uneasy as they approached the Darrell house. The stupendous possibilities of the contemplated interview staggered him. He did not exactly know what he intended to say or do, but he could not doubt that the visit was fraught with great moment. He began to think that he

ought to have written to apprise her of his intention, but it was too late for that now. Be it for good or evil, he must see her that night.

He instructed Brodie to wait for half an hour in the vicinity. At the end of that time, if he did not re-appear, the man was to return to his stable, and expect his customer to reach there considerably later.

"Five minutes will tell how I shall be received," thought Mordaunt. "If she wishes to see me, our conversation may be a long one."

He went softly up the steps, and pulled the bell with so light a touch that it hardly tinkled at all. But the little sound it did make attracted attention within, for some one was soon heard approaching, and a moment later the astonished visitor stood face to face with—Mehitable Burton!

The surprise was mutual, but Mordaunt's trepidation was much the greater.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I came to see Mrs. Darrell. Is she—" he began to feel a nameless alarm—"she is not ill?"

Miss Burton's black eyes pierced him through and through.

"Come in," was her only answer.

She led the way to the parlor, hobbling more than formerly, with her heavy cane. He wondered that he had not heard and recognized the sound of that stick before she opened the door, and he was very much afraid he should have run away had he known it and had time. She handed him a chair, and sat down when he did.

"Why do you wish to see Mrs. Darrell?" she asked.

"That is rather a peculiar question, is it not?"

"Ordinarily, yes. To-night, no."

He hesitated, feeling surer than before that something out of the common had happened.

"Young man," pursued Miss Burton, "you will remember that I told you once that you were on dangerous ground. Let me repeat it now. You can do nothing for a woman who has trouble with her husband—nothing but what will injure her and yourself."

"Miss Burton," he replied, more firmly, "I do not know by what authority you have become the guardian of Mrs. Darrell, toward whom, I have reason to fear, you have not always acted the kindest part. My errand with her is a brief one, but I cannot intrust it to you. Will you oblige me by informing her that I am here."

The maiden lady grasped the stick she held, with a convulsive motion.

"I like you, young man," she said, "and I don't know why unless it is on account of your candor. Whatever your intention was in coming—and I am not going to say it was a wrong one—you have arrived too late. Mrs. Darrell has left this house, and she will not return."

He could hardly believe her ; and yet why should he doubt the explicit statement ?

"Gone !" he exclaimed. "To her husband ?"

"Do you think I would be here if she had !" cried the woman, angrily. "No ! My niece has gone as far as possible away from him, as she ought to have done years and years ago. I have bought the place and all of the furnishings which she did not take. Do you think I gave her that money to go to him ? No, no ! she has seen his face for the last time, I trust !"

Why was he so glad to hear that? He knew that he ought not to be.

"Tell me only this," he said, quietly. "Was she well when she went away, and do you think she will be happy?"

Miss Burton's stern face relaxed under the pathos of his manner.

"She was not well," she replied. "How could she be after all that has been on her mind for the last year? When she gets to a new place and this trouble leaves her, there is no reason why she should not be happy. She has youth, and she will not want for money. No," she added, as he looked up, "she will need none of yours. As long as she keeps from her husband I shall see her needs supplied. If she is ever divorced from him, I will have my will made out again in her favor. Till then, she knows what to expect."

He leaned over toward her, resting his arm on the table that stood between them.

"Be careful that you do not carry this feeling against the poor girl into the grave with you," he said, earnestly. "As you truly say, I cannot now offer her my aid. I wish I could. But why do you not do her full justice? As matters are, she is only certain of an income while you live. Will it make smoother your dying pillow to know in your last moments that you have condemned one of your flesh and blood to want?"

The old woman shut her mouth firmly together.

"It was her own choice; she made it," she answered. "And she knows that I never relent."

He struck the table with his hand and their eyes met.

"If Mrs. Darrell or her children are ever without

means—are ever deprived of their natural protectors—they shall have me to look to!" he said. "I will stand between them and your vindictiveness."

"Dangerous ground, young man, dangerous ground!" repeated Miss Burton, though she did not appear half as angry as he expected she would. "The best thing you can do is to dismiss my niece and her troubles from your mind."

He rose and stood before her.

"If you will promise to execute a new will in her favor without restrictions, I will try to do it," he replied.

"Come, come!" she expostulated, "you are asking too much. It really is not your affair."

"But I shall make it mine, in the event I speak of," he answered firmly. "Good-night, Miss Burton."

The half hour had not expired when Jim Brodie wondering what had happened, drove Mordaunt silently back to Brixton.



CHAPTER XXIII.

"I LOVE YOU, ANNA DARRELL!"

THE step which Mrs. Darrell had taken had been contemplated by her for some weeks. After the open rupture with her husband and the circumstances connected with it, Auburn became exceedingly distasteful; and although she knew nothing of the outside world, she felt that it would be better to

venture out into it than to stay where every scene recalled the bitterness through which she had passed.

Darrell knew his wife very little indeed when he imagined that she had found even partial content in the life to which he had so long doomed her. The fact that for eight years no word of complaint had escaped her, only showed her wifely devotion and her pride of spirit. She could never have teased or cajoled him into favoring her with more of his presence; she could never have suggested even by a look that he ought to take her with him on his travels. The love which she had given him had burst forth spontaneously in her young heart, and nothing but the absolute cruelty of events could have lessened its fervor. In all those years when she hungered and thirsted for the society which he denied her, she suffered as only a deserted woman can suffer and made no sign.

Laura Casson's fling that such a sacrificing wife did not deserve a more faithful husband shows well the difference between the two women. There are fires that burn with a quiet and steady light; there are others which flash their beams far out into the evening. But let no man say that the latter is necessarily the better flame!

One of those evenings of the early winter, just as Ephraim Burton was about to extinguish his lamp,—for the time-honored hour of retiring had nearly arrived—Anna Darrell knocked at her aunt's door. It is only following the manner of Auburn speech to state the occurrence in this form, as nobody ever alluded to her Uncle Ephraim as owning even a roof over his head. Miss Burton's always stern face darkened as the form crossed her threshold, for she had supposed the relations between her niece and

herself severed for good. But she could not resist the sad smile with which Anna greeted her, nor the outstretched hand, and she was soon put in possession of the cause which led to the visit.

Anna was about to leave Auburn and had thought it only right to say good-bye to those who were her sole relations there.

Miss Burton, always suspicious, thought at first that there was in this an attempt on the part of her niece to re-ingratiate herself in the Burton family, with a view to securing the money of which Ephraim's latest will had deprived her. Anna's quiet bearing and evident lowness of spirits soon, however, dispelled this fear. She said she was going away—she did not exactly know where—and she wanted her uncle to take charge of her house and sell it as soon as he could obtain a suitable offer. She had enough money to last her a little while, and perhaps when it was gone she could get something to do. All of which showed her prudent aunt that she was about as fit to go off alone as little Ethel would be, and she told her so.

"But I cannot stay here," said Anna. "You yourself have advised me to go."

"Not without money!" retorted the aunt. "You ought to secure your divorce and a handsome allowance. I hear that your husband is getting rich. He can afford to give you a large sum."

Anna would not listen to her.

"Not—after—after what he accused me of, dear aunt. I could never take his money while he believes that."

At this Miss Burton poured forth the vials of her wrath, denouncing Edmund as a villain of the deepest dye, unworthy the least charitable thought.

"He ought to support his children," she said. "I tell you you must make him do it."

But Anna was inexorable. She had changed her mind on this point. For once Miss Burton had met a spirit as uncontrollable as her own. The wife was willing, anxious to go away, and never wanted to meet her husband again. His money she would not take. That point was settled, and the spinster, after a long debate, was fain to be content. She felt that it was a victory to secure the separation. Perhaps the rest would be reached in time.

The result of the conference was an agreement that Ephraim should take the house and pay her a certain sum for it. It was necessary that she should take money enough with her to live on for some time, and probable customers for such a place were not numerous. Ephraim had an idea that he might dispose of it to a party who wanted to establish a young ladies' school. The house could be enlarged with wings so as to do very well for that purpose. Not a word was to be said in Auburn of Mrs. Darrell's plans. The things she wanted to take with her were to be sent off by instalments, and she was to make her exit with her children without exciting the least suspicion of her purpose.

Everything was carried out as planned, and Anna had not been gone an hour that night when Mor-daunt called at her door.

She went at first to Boston, where she stopped at a hotel until the morrow, intending then to continue her journey to a small town in the western part of Maine. No child ever made a more novel trip. She had never ridden five miles on a steam-road in her life. The towns which she passed seemed innumerable, and, lit up by gaslights as they were,

larger than she had ever conceived possible. When she rode through the streets of Boston she was overpowered with the rush and bustle, and felt her heart sink at the thought that somewhere in the midst of it all was the man who had sworn to love, honor and cherish her till death.

When the next day came she did not take the early train on the Boston & Maine road as she had intended. A new and overpowering desire had come upon her. She wanted to see the woman who could hold for so many years the husband whom she had failed to impress. She had determined, during the long hours of a night when little sleep visited her eyes, to try to see Laura Casson.

She knew the address well. That day that she read it on Clarkson's letter it was impressed indelibly on her mind, and no ordinary lapse of time could efface it. She knew nothing about the city, but she ascertained that cabs could be obtained, and shortly after breakfast she left her little ones with a maid at the hotel and was driven to Miss Casson's house.

It was a wild idea. She did not even know what she was going for. She felt nothing except that strong wish to see her rival. She could not imagine what she should say when she got there. But go she must.

The editress of the *New Light* was astonished to hear that she had a caller who would not send up her card. Thinking it might be some canvasser on whom it was not worth while to waste much time she told the girl to show the lady into her editorial room, where she was writing at the time.

As Mrs. Darrell entered the room the maid withdrew.

"What can I do for you?" asked Miss Casson, politely.

"Nothing."

It was a dignified answer, but certainly a very strange one. Miss Casson, who had risen from her chair, looked at her visitor with some doubt of her sanity. But the handsome lady who stood before her gave no other indications of a deranged mind, and she dismissed the half formed suspicion.

"I understand," she said, "that you wish to see me."

"It is true."

"About—about anything in particular?"

"No, just to see you. That is all."

It suddenly occurred to Miss Casson that the lady might be one of her unknown admirers.

"You had heard of me?" she suggested.

"Yes."

"Will you give me your name?"

"Yes. It is Anna Darrell."

Miss Casson took several paces backward and leaned heavily on her desk. Long weeks of mental distress had made her very nervous. There was something quite alarming in this apparition with the large eyes and laconic speech.

"What do you want?" she almost shrieked. "What do you intend to do?"

"I only wanted to see you—to see what you were like. In eight years I could not make my husband love me. You held him here. I wanted to discover what there was about you that he preferred to me. I do not see anything. You are not as fair as I. You are no taller or better proportioned. Your voice is not as sweet. How did you do it?"

Each sentence was uttered with the utmost de-

liberation, and there was twice the ordinary pause between them. Miss Casson was much disturbed.

"You have heard idle rumors, I fear," she said. "Mr. Darrell and I have merely edited a magazine together. His family affairs are nothing to me. And for a long time now he has not even called here. It is six weeks since I last saw him."

Anna looked at her with unbelieving gaze.

"Why do you say this?" she asked. "He can never be anything more to me. I am going far away with my children—his children. You taught him to believe me untrue. Do not deny it; I saw the letter that man wrote you. But how you have attracted him,"—she looked Miss Casson over from head to feet—"I do not know."

Then she went her way, and an hour later a physician's carriage stopped in front of the house. Miss Casson was quite ill from the shock, and had to suspend her literary labors for some days.

It was a month before Mordaunt found Mrs. Darrell. During all that time he had persisted in his endeavors to discover her retreat. At last he hit upon a clue which revealed it to him. When he knocked at the door, the children had gone to bed, and the one servant—a girl of fourteen—had gone out to spend the evening with her parents. For a moment Anna stood at the threshold looking as if she was about to swoon.

"You do not wish to see me; I will go," he said in a low voice. "And yet, I have much to say to you."

"Come in," she responded, huskily. "I was surprised—that is all. I am very glad to see you, very glad indeed."

He entered, closed the door behind him, folded his arms, and ignored the chair she offered.

"Let there be no misunderstanding!" he cried, passionately. "You shall never say that I came under false pretenses. I love you, Anna Darrell!"

She looked frightened and drew a little away from him.

"It has been months since I have seen you!" he went on, blindly. "God knows how I have been able to endure it! As long as I could visit you, I could bear the rest. But when I was nearly desperate and went to your house—and found that you were gone—then I learned what it was to endure! I have done nothing since but search for you. I thought perhaps your eyes would brighten with joy to see mine. I thought—"

She put up her hand to stay him.

"I am a wife. Do not forget that."

"A wife!" he repeated, bitterly. "And what a wife! You have the yoke of the ox without his food and shelter. Your master has loaded you with burdens and then thrust you aside. You no longer owe him any allegiance. You know that my heart is breaking for you, that my arms are outstretched to receive you, and you can talk to me of *him*!"

"I only know," she answered, slowly, "that I must not listen. During all the months that we have been acquainted, this is the first time you have ever uttered a word to me that I ought not to hear. You can spare me much pain by not doing so again."

He took the chair at last and as he sat down he drew a long breath of desperation.

"Be it so!" he said, after a moment's pause. "Sacrifice your life, your youth, your bloom, to this

heartless, unappreciative man whom you still wish to call husband. Sacrifice *me*! I am of no account compared with what you are pleased to think your duty. Sacrifice everything, but *him*! Throw away the next eight years, as you have the last, and the next eight after that. No one can compel you to do otherwise. Forget that I ever counselled you differently. And now, farewell!"

"Oh, not so soon!" she answered, as he was about to rise. "I am sure you are very welcome here. Tell me what has happened since I left Auburn, for I have heard nothing. What did my aunt say to you?"

"She told me to dismiss you from my mind," he replied, gloomily. "But I could not do it. I should never ask you anything inconsistent with honor. You can easily procure a divorce that will make you as free as though you had never wedded. Afterward, if you love me, you can become mine. Oh, what is the use of this terrible struggle!" he broke forth. "You *do* love me! I *know* it! Is it a greater sin to dissolve this marriage that hurts and galls you, than to maintain it when the result is the ruin of two lives?"

She clasped her hands over her eyes in a sudden ecstasy of pain.

"Have mercy!" she ejaculated, feebly. "You are the stronger, and it is not well that you should tempt me. I have not lived as much in the world as you, but instinct tells me what is right. I have chosen the difficult path. Every word you speak makes it harder to tread."

"Tell me one thing." He leaned toward her and his breath fanned her brow. "You love me, is not so?"

Her honest eyes met his, and all the answer he needed was in their depths.

"I am not as good as I ought to be," she said, gently. "You came into my life when I was very lonely. I grew to like you before I knew what I was doing. If it was wrong, I shall be punished. But when I discovered it, I did all I could. I came away, hoping to forget you, hoping you would forget me. I cannot do this all alone. You must help. If I do love you, it is as hard for me as for you that we must be separated. Let us bear the load together."

He caught eagerly at the word.

"Together!" he echoed. "If we only could!"

"I mean mutually," she stammered. "You your share and I mine."

"And how long must this last?" he inquired. "Is it to be endless? Supposing," he hesitated, "supposing that death intervenes?"

Mrs. Darrell started at the suggestion.

"Never, by the remotest implication, could I promise myself to another man while my husband is alive," she answered. "You know my sentiments. You ask me if I love you. Secure in my determination to do what is right I may admit even that. If I could have foreseen the end earlier I could have saved us both from what we suffer to-day. But now, our only safety is in remaining far apart."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TOUCH OF LIPS.

He made another move as if to rise, but sank back in his chair and was silent for several minutes.

"You are willing that I should come and see you sometimes?" he said, when he broke the silence.

"Would it be best?"

He suddenly drew his chair nearer to her and folded her in his arms.

"Anna! Can nothing move you? Is it possible that you can go on forever under this mistaken sense of Duty and never awake to a knowledge of what you are doing? You are a woman in years. You have been called a wife. You have borne children. But never till now have the arms of a real love encompassed you. In the innocence of childhood you made a contract with Edmund Darrell and he made a like one with you. He was to love and cherish you till death. You know he never fulfilled one iota of his bargain, while for these eight years you have been true to yours. Now that he has deserted you, wholly and heartlessly, let him go out of your mind. Forget that he lives. Give your life, your soul, your love to one who would give up all else he holds dear to purchase you the slightest happiness. You are wavering already. You feel that this is the way your course should lie. Anna, my darling! Touch my lips just once and I will take it for your answer!"

She did not struggle in his arms, as he half anticipated she would; but her great eyes were bent on

him and he read in them a deeper pain than he had imagined she could feel.

"You know so much more of the world than I," was her response, "that I want you to answer me a question. Is it right, from *your own* standpoint, that you should embrace me like this? Would it be right—as the people you know interpret right—if I should give you my lips to kiss?"

He broke from her and paced the floor like a savage.

"No, no!" he cried. "It is *not* right! But I am no longer responsible for what I do. My love has carried me away from myself; and after all, who can tell what right is? I have embraced you. Who is the worse for it? If I should kiss you, who would suffer?"

The evident distress under which he labored told on the young wife. Her sympathetic nature, aided by the high regard which she had for him, strained her resolutions to their utmost tension. In spite of the reflection that his arms ought not to be about her, there had been bliss in the moments when she felt them there. Her heart had beaten more rapidly at the proposal. She knew that the longer the conference lasted the harder it would be to resist him.

"We have nothing to do but to summon all our courage," she said, going to where he stood. "We must not act like children, who cry for what they cannot have. Men and women have gone to the scaffold—even to the stake—with smiling faces. Let us be very brave now and say—good-bye."

Her voice faltered at the final word and he very gently put his arm about her again.

"It may be right, Anna, it may be wrong, but I love you. It may be right, it may be wrong, but I

cannot give you up. The strength to wait until you can be legally my wife is all that I shall be able to find. The strength to go forth leaving you tied to a man for whom you have no reason to care, a man who has forfeited any claim that he may ever have had, will never come. Apply for your divorce on the ground of desertion. Your husband has offered to give you that without a contest. It will take six months, perhaps a year, before you are free. Must I wait longer than that for you?"

His words moved her powerfully. She looked him full in the face. A sensation as if her brain was steeped in poppies overwhelmed her.

"If you should kiss me once—just once before you go—what harm could it do?" she repeated, in the tones of a sleep walker. She took his face between her hands. "Just once—on the lips," she continued, in the same dreamy tone. "Just—once!"

Something rushed across his mind, like a cyclone. He saw with horror the pit on the edge of which they stood. Summoning all his strength he took a step backward. "No!" he cried, releasing his hold of her. "You were right, and I was wrong. Until you are free I ought not to touch you. Your Aunt Burton told me the truth. I am indeed on dangerous ground. I want your promise to be my wife, or at least I want you to say that you will apply at once for a separation from your husband. In the meantime we must not trifle with ourselves. To-day you are married. A kiss from you to me means infidelity."

He ground his teeth together as he said it, for he realized the inappropriateness of the disagreeable word.

"Why, you are my brother," replied Anna, her

voice trembling at the sudden shock to her emotions. "I may give you a sisterly kiss, may I not?"

He straightened himself up, with the new strength that had come to him.

"No, I am not your brother," he said. "I am your passionate lover—I am your husband that is to be. Up to this hour *I* have never done anything—you have never done anything—to make us look back on our acquaintance with a blush. We must not begin. It takes so little to cause regret for a lifetime. I know you are going to be my wife. You have not said it, but it will have to be. The first kiss I will give or take from you shall be on our wedding morning."

She closed her eyes and shrank about the shoulders as if his words hurt her.

"I was right in the first place," she replied, as he finished. "My husband lives and I am his till death. It is true I would have kissed you. Do not misapprehend me on that account. I hold your friendship very dear. I care enough for you to marry you if I were free, but not enough to take the step you suggest to free myself. I am afraid I cannot make you understand, but I will try. If you were not in existence, I would apply for my divorce to-morrow. It is because I am placed in the position of seeking it—not for the purpose of dissolving my present union, but to make one with you—that I cannot bring myself to do it."

He contemplated her silently for some time, trying to think what it was best to say.

"Let us be honest with each other," he said at last. "We can afford to be that. Answer my questions truthfully, as you hope for heaven."

"I will," she replied.

"You love me?"

She bowed her head.

"And I love you. You no longer care for your husband?"

She indicated a negative.

"Still you propose to continue in the chains of matrimony with him as long as you both shall live?"

"I must," she faltered.

"And if he should decide, as he has the right to do, to live with you again——"

"Oh, no! not that! never!" she exclaimed.

He smiled ironically.

"You do not know the law," he said. "He can compel you."

"But he would not!"

"How can you tell?"

Her cheek blanched at the thought, and when she raised her eyes to his again, there was a look of terror in them.

"I wanted to know what your intentions were," he said. "You purpose retaining of your husband nothing but his name. What good will that do you? Is it a better name than mine?"

She did not answer, and he persisted, hoping to change her view.

"You intend to remain his wife, in name only. Supposing he decides to rid himself of even that claim. You have deserted him. He need only go to the court and show that fact to procure his freedom. That will leave you with a tinge of disgrace, which you would not have if you took the initiative."

"Disgrace?" she repeated, vaguely.

"Yes. You will be in a blamable position, which you will not deserve. Then, if you marry again, people will say——"

"But I should not marry again," she replied. "Then people could say nothing."

He saw that he had used the wrong argument, and he returned to the original proposition.

"On the other hand, if you apply for the divorce, all of your friends will believe you justified. Everybody in Auburn has given you their sympathies all these years. Darrell has violated every agreement that he made with you. Why are you so afraid of causing him uneasiness?"

She trembled visibly.

"I wish I had had more experience," she said, reflectively. "I can do things from impulse and forgive myself, but I dread a deliberate act that may be full of momentous consequences. I have no doubt my attitude surprises you. A few moments ago you clasped me in your arms and I did not protest. A moment later, had you not stopped me, I would have given you my lips to kiss. I had no time for reflection. In your embrace I found peace. In your kiss I knew was ecstasy, the joy I had never known and now never shall know. I would have accepted it then, without a thought of consequences. But to apply coolly to a judge, to wait month after month, to appear in a court room and recite my story—for that I have neither the strength nor the patience. If Edmund would do it instead, I should be glad. If there is any odium I will bear it, though the people who have known me all my life will understand how little I am to blame. And yet, to marry afterwards, how could I?"

He took up his hat and held out his hand for a farewell.

"It is evident," he said, bitterly, "that when you talk of love you do not understand in the least what

the word means. I shall be better able to bear my loss when I remember how little *you* are willing to sacrifice for it."

All the tide of passion that she had held back swept over Anna Darrell and bore her onward like a flood. She threw her rounded arms around Mordaunt's neck and strained him to her bosom.

"I love you more than you can ever love me!" she cried. "Try as I may I cannot conceal it. Tell me what I ought to do. I can bear disgrace, the upbraidings of my conscience, anything except to lose you!"

Forgetting what he had said so short a time before, he pressed his lips to hers.

"Write to Mr. Jacobs," he whispered, "before you go to bed to-night, telling him to institute proceedings immediately."

"I will," she answered, brightly. "Let me get the paper now, and you shall tell me what to say."

She opened the writing desk and sat down to it, but he hesitated to dictate the words. It seemed awfully like a plot.

"There is no need for me to word your communication for you," he said, bending tenderly over her shoulder. "All you want is a simple statement that you wish a separation for desertion and as soon as possible. Ask him how long it will take if there is no opposition."

She looked quite happy and raised her lips to his again.

"And where are you going to be?" she asked. "I must write and tell you his answer."

"I will return here a week from to-night," he replied.

She frowned prettily.

"A week? Oh, that is a very long time!"

"How we have changed in the last five minutes!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she laughed. "I have tasted something which makes me another creature. I did not know the touch of your lips would be so intoxicating. I am drunk, Harry, drunk with my love for you!"

He felt a certain horror creeping through his veins at the change that was in her—this woman whom he had adored for her faith and loyalty, even while he cursed the unhappy ties that bound her.

And, though he kissed her again, he left her with more misgivings than he had ever felt before.

CHAPTER XXV.

"IT IS TOO LATE, EDMUND."

Engrossed in his business, Edmund Darrell knew none of these things. The question whether his wife was or was not faithful had never been settled in his mind. She had elected to go her way, and allowed him to go his, which he believed relieved him of all responsibility for her future action. As to the past, his main thought about it was that it was very disagreeable. His marriage had been a grand mistake. He had no desire to risk another error of the same sort and therefore did not pine for greater freedom than he possessed. He had nothing left but his theories and his business, and just at this time there was a particular reason why the latter demanded his undivided attention.

When he had perfected the invention which he confidently believed would bring him a fortune, he had had to call upon capital other than his own to put it properly before the world. So evident did it seem that immense returns must ensue that he had not the slightest difficulty in interesting a number of gentlemen who were on the lookout for such opportunities. A company was chartered with a capital stock of \$500,000, one-fifth of which was actually paid in. Darrell's socialistic attitude was quite opposed to the modern methods of doing business, but he consoled himself with the reflection that there was no other way to accomplish his ends, and that he should conscientiously use the fortune, when it was acquired, in promoting the cause he cherished.

It happened, however, at about the time of his open rupture with his wife, that a suspicion arose as to the complete originality of his invention. A solicitor who had been deputed to obtain the patents in Sweden reported that a similar process had been already registered there. Considerably agitated at this news, Darrell could not content himself with the slow vehicle afforded by the mails, but after consulting with his directors, sailed for Europe to give the matter his personal attention.

On his arrival at Stockholm he found things even worse than he had anticipated. The vital principle that he had relied upon had undoubtedly been discovered by the Swedes, and they had even had a factory in operation upon the product for more than a year.

His first thought was to buy them out and amalgamate the two concerns. But the Scandinavians were in no hurry to accept his offer. They saw, as

clearly as he did himself, that he was in their power, and they rejected his proposals as fast as he made them. His directors at home, when they learned the state of the case, were furious. They accused him of obtaining their money under false pretenses, and announced their intention of winding up the company under process of law, in order to recover what percentage they could of the amount they had invested.

Stung to the quick by these things, Darrell did not know what course to pursue. A year before he would have turned, without a question of the result, to a friend who had plenty of capital and who would certainly have aided him—Harold Mordaunt. This was no longer to be thought of, and he knew of no one else on whom he could depend. Capital uninfluenced by confidence or friendship is the most wary of all the birds that fly. There was not in Darrell's veins one drop of swindler's blood, and he could not have asked any one to lend him a dollar which he did not feel morally certain he should be able to return with interest. In despair at the turn affairs had taken, he finally offered himself to the Swedish concern, hoping to get them to give him a share in exchange for what he could do in the rest of Europe and the United States. But all they would propose was a very moderate salary and contingent commissions, which looked very vague indeed. And after wasting the whole of the winter, the discouraged man shook the spring mud of Stockholm from his feet and went to Paris.

Among the letters which he found awaiting him there was one from Laura Casson. In it he learned that she had seen paragraphs in the newspapers which led her to fear he was in want of

money. She wrote to offer him all that she had, and expressed the hope that he would not refuse to accept it. "As you know," she said, "the Professor bequeathed me in his will the savings of his lifetime. They were not large, but such as they are, they are yours. I can cable you \$25,000 at a day's notice, and more later if you require it. If this will save you, do not let by-gones stand in the way. I make it purely as a business proposition."

He read the letter twice and then he fed the fire with it. Not for an instant did it enter his mind to accept her proposal.

Another envelope, which had travelled long, and reached him covered with post-marks, contained the legal notice that his wife had asked for a divorce on the ground of desertion. The time assigned for the hearing was near at hand. He thought it over for an hour, and decided to make no response. Her allegation was true. He had deserted her. If she wanted her freedom, why should she not have it? What did she want it for? To marry Mordaunt, undoubtedly. It was as well that way. Anna was still young. She would probably marry some one, and why not Harold? There were the children. Ill luck was pursuing their father at every turn. It was something to know that they would not have to share it.

Several weeks went by. Darrell, feeling the need of husbanding what money he had left, lived in an inexpensive lodging in the Rue Vaugiraud. His sentiments naturally led him into conferences with the Communistic leaders, who were hoping for something to occur which would make a Republic possible, and at one of the earliest meetings that he attended he met George Clarkson.

The two men bowed stiffly to each other. Neither of them felt like shaking hands. Darrell, on his part, did not know why he had this feeling, but he refrained intuitively from anything beyond the most ordinary politeness. After that they met quite frequently, often sitting together around tables on which a two-franc dinner was spread, or in little halls up dark side streets, consulting—always consulting—with a motley crowd, on “the situation.” Clarkson was looking very badly. His face was pale, and it would not have required a physician to convince one that the limit of his life was already fixed. Among the conspirators, for such the associates really deserve to be called, none were more in earnest than he.

“I shall not live long,” he said one day, “but I hope to see a vacant throne in France before I die.”

No one in the circle to which they belonged imagined that the two Americans had known each other in their native land. They never came or went together. They never engaged in mutual conversation, each seeming to prefer talking to others of the party, which was usually made up of many nationalities. It would have surprised any of their acquaintances as much as it did Darrell, to find Clarkson at his door one evening, and hear his feeble voice saying, “I want to talk with you.”

There was no reason that Darrell knew why he should not admit this man. He had refrained from intimacy with him mainly because his presence recalled scenes which he was only too anxious to forget, and not because he had any reason to suspect the double dealing of which he had been guilty. So he received him with a show of civility and waited to learn his errand.

"I know you do not like me, Mr. Darrell," was the way the visitor began, "and I will make my stay as short as possible. I came to ask you a question which might seem impertinent if I did not intend to explain it in advance. You are too honorable a man to misconstrue my motive. As you and everybody else can see, I am on the down-hill road, travelling at break-neck speed. If I could ever have been your rival—which I am far from believing—that time is passed. I only came here to ask how soon you are to be—to be married."

Darrell stared at him with a newly awakened pity. He thought the brain had failed even before the body succumbed.

"If you will think a moment," he responded, "you will recollect that I have been married a long time. Do you not remember the incident at Auburn?"

Clarkson took a newspaper from his pocket which he slowly unfolded.

"My mind is quite clear," he said. "I know what I am saying. Read this paragraph, and you will see that you are married no longer."

Darrell read the paragraph blankly. Clarkson had received the news before him. A divorce had been granted to Anna Burton Darrell against her husband Edmund for desertion.

"You see," spoke up Clarkson's thin voice, "that you are free. You can marry as soon as you like. All I want to know is, when it will take place. I do not think you will refuse to tell me."

"I cannot understand what you mean," replied Darrell, feeling his former suspicion re-asserting itself. "It appears that my wife has secured a

divorce, as you say. Beyond that I do not know what you are talking about."

Clarkson's pale face grew a shade sadder at this announcement.

"It can do you no harm to tell me," he said, wistfully. "It is true that I love her, and shall carry that love to my grave. But it is also true that she loves you ; that there neither is nor ever was the least hope for me. I gave up every thought of it when I crossed the sea. I expected to die without another glimpse of her. But last night I heard you say you did not intend to leave France this year, and I knew that meant she would come here for the wedding. I thought perhaps you would consent that I should be present, for I am quite reconciled. She has been unhappy for such a long time. Nothing else in the world will bring back the brightness in her eyes, and I have done with selfishness. Think of it again. When you consider everything, you will tell me, I am sure."

As he went on speaking, the error under which he labored dawned gradually upon Darrell.

"Are you speaking of Miss Casson?" he asked.

"Yes," responded Clarkson, eagerly. "Of whom else could I speak in that way?"

"Then you are making a mistake," was the reply. "I assure you I have no intention whatever of another marriage. As for Miss Casson, I have not even written her since I came to Europe last autumn. Our business partnership has been dissolved."

The eyes of the consumptive opened wider than ever.

"Is that possible!" he ejaculated. "Why, she loves you with all the devotion that such a woman

can feel for the man of her choice. For years you were attached to her. What could have come between you?" He paused a moment, and then added suddenly, "It was not the silly letter that I wrote when my mind was wandering? I sent you a note explaining that. Nor could it have been jealousy of me. When I searched for her heart I found where it had gone. She frankly told me that I had no chance whatever. It cannot be that anything has estranged you. You were made for each other. Something must be done. If there is a misunderstanding it ought to be set right."

The strangeness of the situation presented itself to Darrell's mind, in spite of the pathos of this appeal. But he knew no way except the straightforward one of truth.

"Nothing can make possible a marriage between Miss Casson and myself," he said. "It is true that we were deeply attached friends. Before I entered upon my own unfortunate union, I liked, perhaps even loved her. At that time she was engaged to Professor Marlin, and I supposed she would soon be his wife. After his death our mutual liking kept us much together. I neglected my own family in a way which I cannot defend, and yet which I could not have helped without violating every feeling in my heart. The affair of last summer has wrought a great change in me, which subsequent events have intensified. My marital experience was not of a kind to induce me to attempt a second one. Besides this, I have met with pecuniary reverses. I have lost not only the fortune I considered certain, but most of what I had saved before I patented my invention. I should have nothing to offer a wife.

I am a discouraged, broken-down man, whose ambitions have left him."

Clarkson heard him with surprise, but at the last sentence he seemed filled with a new animation.

"I have some money," he said. "It is yours if—" Darrell shook his head.

"No. The fight has gone out of me. I found that a firm of Swedes in Stockholm discovered my process before I did. Six months ago, if I had had money enough, I could have done something. It is too late now, and I do not feel any regrets. After a while I shall return to the United States and begin life over again."

The more Clarkson thought about it the surer he became that nothing would move this man to accept his offer.

"You are not sorry about the divorce?" he asked.

"No. I had time to prevent it had I chosen to do so. Your revelations made it impossible for my wife and I ever to live together again. But they did much more. They undermined my faith in all women. How could I marry again when such a wife as mine could prove untrue?"

The pale face grew paler yet. Its owner was ready to sacrifice everything, even his reputation for truth, in the interest of the woman he loved.

"There is something I ought to tell you," he said, in a low voice. "I have written it out and left it to be sent to you after my—my death. But what you say makes me feel that I ought to tell you now. It is a—*a confession.*"

Darrell was suddenly interested, but he did not make any verbal reply. He only listened intently.

"I cannot live long," pursued Clarkson, "and if

you choose to hasten my end it will matter little. But I want to tell you the truth about your wife—"

Entirely forgetting the man's helplessness, Darrell caught him roughly by the throat, and seemed about to strangle him then and there.

"You villain!" he cried. "What do you mean?"

Then it occurred to him that he was making it impossible for Clarkson to answer, and he released his hold, still, however, maintaining his attitude of hostility. The consumptive was too much overcome to speak for a few moments, and Darrell, recovering his senses, brought him a glass of water, which he drank feverishly.

"Do you mean that she was guiltless?" demanded Darrell, when the other gave signs of being able to speak.

Clarkson bowed.

"And there was no truth in the report you made?"

"None," was the faint reply.

"But," continued Darrell, still half incredulous, "why did you invent the stories? What could have been your object?"

"I hated *him*."

"Mordaunt?"

"Yes."

The two men sat looking at each other for some minutes.

"If you believed in anything, I would make you swear to this," Darrell said, at last.

"It is true," replied the other, "true as that I hope for a democracy in France. I have no reason for lying to you now."

Darrell was convinced, but he felt no lessening of resentment for the bearer of the tidings.

"If you are indeed speaking the truth to-day," said he, "you are self-accused of a most cruel act. You have calumniated my wife, the mother of my children. You have taken away the reputation of an innocent woman, and for what? To gratify a fiendish animosity toward another person. From this hour forth I shall refuse to speak to you under whatever circumstances we may meet. Nothing but the knowledge that death is already close upon your track prevents my wreaking the summary vengeance that you deserve!"

He opened wide the door of the room as he spoke, and added, laconically, "*Go!*"

"One word—just one!" gasped Clarkson. "You will do justice to Miss Casson?"

"*Go!*"

"She is in no way to blame for my folly. She loves you deeply. She—"

"*Go*, or I shall forget your weakness and lay my hand on you!" was the fierce reply. "*Go*, and never attempt to speak to me again as long as you live!"

The frail man lingered no longer. That night Darrell's landlord received notice that he should be away for several weeks.

The next day he was on the ocean, bound for New York. Pacing the deck of the steamer alone, day and evening, he seldom spoke to any other passenger. Rapidly as the boat sped on her way, the voyage seemed endlessly long to him.

When he reached Boston he called upon his attorney and learned that the divorce, being *nisi*, was still open for a contest. He directed Mr. Arnold to prepare at once the proper papers denying the allegation of desertion and setting forth the fact

that he had been travelling in foreign lands on business while the suit was in progress. Then he went to Auburn, where he found a deserted house, in the yard of which the early summer weeds and grass were rank.

There are few things more dispiriting than revisiting one's old home and finding it in this condition. It seemed to him as if all his family had died. He hesitated about inquiring of any of the neighbors, and was deliberating what to do when Landlord Upham of the Auburn House drove by and espied him.

"My family have gone away, it appears," he said, as the landlord reined in his horses.

"More'n six months ago," was the reply. "I guess they didn't look to see you 'round these parts ag'in," he added, sarcastically.

"Can you tell me where they have gone?" asked Darrell, not thinking it worth while to notice the satirical quality of the answer.

"Wall, it's out of Auburn, sure," said Mr. Upham. "An' out of the State, if I'm any guesser. Nobody knows, 'cept Miss Burton. She could tell you; but that ain't sayin' that I think she would."

There was no friendliness in the landlord's manner, and Darrell moved silently up the street. Galling as it was, he felt that he had no recourse except to call upon Aunt Mehitable.

Miss Burton and her brother Ephraim were standing in the yard of their house when he arrived at the gate, and both of them showed great surprise at seeing him. Ephraim bowed with that entire absence of either love or hate in his manner for which he was famous. Miss Burton straightened her thin neck

and stood like a soldier whose gun is in a position to repel cavalry.

"I have come to see my wife, Miss Burton," said Darrell. "I find the house empty, and am told that you can give me her new address."

Not for another year of life would the spinster have relinquished the exquisite pleasure which she felt in the reply she was able to make :

"Your wife, Mr. Darrell ! Is it possible that you have married again so soon ?"

He winced under the unexpected thrust.

"You know who I mean," he answered. "During my absence, I understand, certain proceedings have been taken, but they are not final, and I am in a position to have them set aside. Your niece is still my wife and I have strong reasons for desiring to see her. Will you tell me where she is ?"

Her face was distorted with rage at his announcement.

"Thank you, no !" she replied, bitterly. "The unhappy girl whose love you abused for so long is out of your clutches. She has taken the first step to free herself from you. It will take only the lapse of a few months to make her divorce absolute. If there is one particle of sense left in your head you will make no attempt to annoy her further."

Ephraim, who had been eyeing them both with the calm gaze of an ox, turned away to drive some hens out of a flower-bed.

"I shall find her with little trouble," Darrell answered Miss Burton. "When I do, I shall have something of importance to tell her. After she has heard it she shall decide whether she still wishes a separation from me. You have always hated me, and I am not surprised at your attitude. But my

wife—my wife, understand—shall decide entirely for herself."

He strode away without waiting for the reply which in her wrath she would have thrown at him. Engaging a carriage at the livery stable he drove to the country seat, where he asked to look at the papers in the case of "*Darrell vs. Darrell.*" As he anticipated, the address he desired was there. "Anna Burton Darrell, now of Stillwell, Me."

The next day he was at Stillwell, and when his wife opened the door she stared at him with a vague alarm.

"Don't let me frighten you, Anna," he said. "I have something to say which I could not very well write, and so I came in person. I shall only stay a few minutes. May I take a chair?"

The children were playing in the rear of the house, and the maid was engaged in the kitchen. There was no one to overhear what they said.

"I have not come to justify myself, Anna," pursued the man, hurriedly. "I know I have never used you right. In one sense I have always been true to you—yes, I swear it, before God—but in another I have violated all the sacred promises I made when we were wedded. I realize as I never did before the enormity of my offences. But that is not what I came so far to say, for two weeks ago I was in Paris, and I took the long journey entirely for the sake of this brief conversation. In the first place I want to beg your pardon for the suspicions that I entertained against you, and to say that the person who made the charges that I then believed, has confessed that they are entirely without foundation. You have entered a suit against me for divorce. When I thought that you had violated

your vows, I was willing that you should have an unconditional separation. Now that I am convinced of your truth, I want to offer you again my love and support,—not the kind of love you had before, but the love you should have had and the life by my side that you ought to have led. First, tell me that I am forgiven. I was deceived. Say that you pardon me."

Anna Darrell's tears fell fast.

"How shall I hope to be forgiven, if I do not forgive?" she said.

"And—can you—is there room in your heart for me?"

She looked him full in the eyes, as was her habit, though her own orbs swam.

"It is too late, Edmund. The love which I gave you during those long years of neglect is dead. I harbor no resentment. I wish you every happiness. But I can never again be your wife."

He had expected the answer; indeed he could hardly conceive how it should be otherwise, but it hurt him, nevertheless.

"I ought not to be disappointed," he said, with an effort. "I make no claim on what I threw aside when it was all my own. But there are the children. Who will care for them?"

The mother's instinct brought the blood to her cheek.

"Who *has* cared for them ever since they were born? I am no less able now than before. They are mine and mine they shall remain."

The husband hesitated a minute.

"Will you answer me a question?" he asked.

"Perhaps."

"Do you love Harry Mordaunt?"

It might have been the most ordinary question in the world, judging from the calm way in which he put it. It might have been the most mementous, judging by the way she received it.

"Have you come all this distance to insult me?" she demanded.

"No, only to settle my future course. If you are to be separated from me you must rely upon some one. If it is to be Mordaunt, say so; that is all I wish to know. I have no animosity toward him. When you are free from me you will be your own mistress. Tell me, Anna, is it to be Mordaunt?"

She buried her face in her hands, and her silence was a sufficient reply for him.

"Well, then, it is Harry. You are to have a husband and I am to lose a wife. Is it not fair that I should have the charge of one of our children?"

She sprang to her feet and towered above him in her excitement.

"Which one?" she cried. "Which one of them do you think you have earned the right to take from me—from me, who bore them, nursed them, taught them to speak and have never slept beyond the sound of their voices? Why, they are only babies! You have no home to take them to. Unless—unless"—she paused, "you intend to give your name to Laura Casson!"

In spite of all he managed to maintain the evenness of his demeanor.

"The question of my ever marrying any woman but you is beyond debate," said he. "I have neither seen nor written to Miss Casson for eight months. You can complete your divorce and marry whom you please, but one of the children I have a right to claim and you ought to concede it without contest."

She went to the window, where she could see them both playing on the lawn.

"They would not go with you, unless you used force," she said, turning toward him. "Would you tear them from their mother against their will?"

"They are too young to understand," he replied, "but I will leave it to them. If you dare let them decide, I will abide by their choice."

Confident beyond expression that the test would vanquish him, Anna tapped upon the pane, and motioned to the little ones. A minute later they came trooping in, shouting in childish glee, each anxious to be first. At the threshold there was a sudden pause. Ethel put her tongue in her cheek, and crept softly to her mother's side. Alice stood for one brief moment like a little statue, and then flew into her father's arms.

"Papa! papa!" she cried. "You have come home to stay!"

Where did she get it—this never-fading love for the sire whom she had not seen a dozen times since she was old enough to remember him?

"No, little one," said Darrell, whose eyes had become all at once very moist, "I have not come home to stay. I shall have to go away again very soon, and travel many miles across the sea, and be gone a very long time. Mamma and I were just talking about it as you came in. I told her I wished I could take one of my children with me, because there are times when I become very lonesome. She thought you were both too young to leave her, but she said if either of you wished to go with me, she would consent. So she called you in, and we are waiting for your answer."

The child looked grave. Her little face grew very old as she heard him.

"Are you obliged to go?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes, there is no help for it."

"Why can't you take all of us?"

"It is not possible. I cannot explain it," he said.

"I must either go alone or take you or Ethel."

Ethel heard her name spoken and lifted her head from her mother's lap.

"I won't go off with no man," she lisped. "I shall stay with mamma."

"Well, Alice, how is it with you?"

The child looked from one of her parents to the other and her little bosom heaved.

"Mamma," she said, "you have had me all my life, and papa needs me. If you are willing, I will go with him."

Then she burst into violent sobbing.

"She has decided," said the father, quietly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"MRS. GRUNDY IS VERY USEFUL."

Anna had given her word ; and though she thought her heart would break she never dreamed of keeping Alice from her father after she had offered to go with him.

It was arranged that he should return to Boston, and come for the child a week later. The sad task of preparing the little wardrobe was begun. It almost seemed to the mother as if the garments she was

preparing were grave clothes. She felt that Alice might never return—but she had given her promise.

While engaged in packing the things on the last day before her husband was expected, Mordaunt made his appearance. A few words, broken by sobs, told him the story.

"Alice is a very odd child," was his comment. "Of course, when you accepted his proposal, you had no idea that she would be willing to go."

"I should never have imagined it possible," she replied. "And yet ever since she could speak she has been extravagantly fond of him. She used to get worked into the most frightful fits of temper when Aunt Burton spoke of him slightly. She was horrified one day, when he came to see us, at Ethel's refusal to recognize him. Even the articles that he had touched seemed to become sacred to her. Papa's chair, papa's plate, papa's napkin were held by her far above all similar furniture. When you reflect how little she has seen of him it is most remarkable."

He watched her silently for some minutes as she resumed her labors.

"How you must have loved him in the first months of your marriage!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because there is no other way of accounting for Alice's infatuation. It was born in her."

She bent her head over the trunk, as the memory of those days came back to her. Again she walked with him through the pine woods. Again she heard his gentle voice, and felt his strong arm. Yes, she had loved him, indeed!

"I *did* love him!" she said, looking up. "I loved him till that moment when I heard him doubt me

I loved through all those years of neglect. But those words of his killed my love with one blow."

He leaned back in the rocker and looked at her.

"Are you sure—very sure—that it is all dead?" he asked. "I sometimes fear that it may revive. No, I ought not to say I 'fear' it. If it would make you happier, I ought to rejoice."

She arose and stood beside him.

"But you would not rejoice, Harry. You would be very, very sad."

He took the hand she held out.

"I want to do what is right, at whatever cost to myself," he said. "And something tells me that I ought to go away from you, and stay until the complexion of things is altered."

"Go away!" she exclaimed. "Is he to take Alice, and am I to lose you, too?"

It pleased him to hear her say this, but he persisted.

"We are both of us a little touched by insanity," said he. "You are still a wife, and will be until the six months expire, when your divorce is to be made absolute. Think back one year, and imagine yourself listening to words of love under circumstances like these."

Her eyes dilated.

"Do you feel guilty?" she asked, nervously.

"Sometimes I feel this way—that I am degrading you. I feel that we are acting too precipitously. The least thing that I ought to do is to go away, and stay till you are free."

She beat the carpet with her foot.

"And why do you not do it?"

"It is so difficult."

She took a chair, more to vary her posture than

anything else, and clasped her hands over her knees.

"But it must be done," she said. "Yes, I see it clearly now. It must be done."

"Then you ought to leave this humdrum village," said Mordaunt. "You ought to go somewhere where there is movement, in order to divert your mind. Not to New York—I shall be there a good deal—but to some other of the large cities, say to Philadelphia. If you needed me, it would be easy to send word."

After a little further talk, this course was decided on. And, though it gave a pang to them both, they parted with only a verbal good-by, fearing to trust themselves with even a clasp of the hands.

Darrell came for his daughter at the time agreed upon. He had written to Anna, begging her to make the parting as simple as possible, and the mother gave up her child with dry eyes, and a forced appearance of contentment. Alice herself wept vehemently, but still persevered in her determination to go. When the carriage had gone, Anna felt as if she had only one living child left; and with no one to help her, she took up the burden of existence again with a heavy heart.

But there was one thing she had neglected to provide against. Miss Burton had not been consulted in the disposition of the child, and when she learned what had been done—after it was a *fait accompli*—she fairly boiled over with rage. She wrote her niece a letter, declaring that by this action she had forfeited all claim to her further good-will, and that she need expect nothing whatever from her from that time forth.

"As you have preferred to listen to the man who

was so disgraced you, rather than to me, your choice is your own," said the letter. "Never again will I give a thought to you, never shall a penny of mine find its way to your pocket. I disown you completely. Go where you please, do what you like, but never let me see or hear from you."

Anna's cheek burned with indignation as she read. Her only design in consulting with her aunt had been to gain moral support, not pecuniary aid. She had accepted the small sums sent her, with some doubts of the propriety of doing so. To have it thrust in her face, as if she were a beggar, was too humiliating. She had declined Edmund's proposal to divide with her what he had left, and now he was on the sea, and could not be reached, even were she disposed to write to him. The sum that she had on hand was very small. It would take her to Philadelphia, but would not provide for her and Ethel very long after she got there. It was evident that she must seek paid employment.

Upon arriving at the City of Brotherly Love she consulted the newspapers. Inexperienced as a child, she set out to answer some of the advertisements which seemed to offer engagements suitable to her capacity. She was surprised and disappointed at the small compensation offered, hardly more than she had paid her cook at Auburn. There was one exception—an old gentleman who wanted a house-keeper, and who said that Ethel would be no objection whatever. He told her to fix her own salary; but there was something in his manner—she did not know what—that alarmed her, and she told him that she would have to think about it. When she reached her room she was glad to remember that she had not given him her address.

Mordaunt wrote to her, but she thought it best not to answer him just at present. Through the kind offices of her landlady, she got half-a-dozen children to teach the rudiments of English, but the sum received did not quite suffice to pay her rent and the cost of the meals which she cooked herself over her little stove. She began to grow rebellious. One evening she pawned her watch for twenty-five dollars—it had cost one hundred—and was coming home, when she encountered Harold Mordaunt on the sidewalk.

He knew the moment he saw her that she was in some new trouble, and though she resolved not to confide it to him, she had told him all about it before they had walked four blocks together.

"The old harridan!" he exclaimed, in allusion to Miss Burton. "And how long would you have fought it out like this without letting me know?"

"I hated to write of it to you," she answered, clinging to his arm. "I could not accept favors, when there is no way in which I can repay them."

"No way!" He uttered the words like a cry. "No way, Anna! In September—just as soon as the law will permit—I want you to take my name. Don't oppose me any more. You must have a protector. It is outrageous for you to go on as you have been doing. And darling little Ethel, too! It will break you down. You are not used to it."

How dearly she wished she could agree with him; but she could not.

"There is no need of saying such things to me," she said. "I cannot marry you. And that being the case, I cannot honorably accept your assistance."

"What *will* you do, then?" he blurted out.

"Starve? Haven't you had enough of this? But, if I cannot lend money to you, I can to Ethel. She won't refuse it, from her best uncle. Take me to your house, and let me talk it over with her."

At first Anna positively refused to show him where she lived, but he plead so hard to be allowed one look at his little "niece," that she relented. With heightened color she led him into the barely furnished chamber that was parlor, kitchen, bed-room, everything to her and her child. Ethel's delight at seeing him was boundless. He made her say a hundred cunning things, to which he called her mother's attention, as tending to prove his side of the case; and when she grew tired he assisted in undressing her, and held her in his arms until she was asleep.

"Before I go," he said, as he laid the child on the pillow, and stood waiting, with an instinctive knowledge that he ought not to remain much later, "I want you to promise that you will accept the money I am going to send you to-morrow. You can call it a present, a loan, or what you please, but you must take it without a word."

Her voice trembled much as she tried to answer him.

"I have been thinking a great deal since I met you to-night, and I have tried to reach a right conclusion. If I were entirely alone in the world, I could earn my own bread. It is because of Ethel that I have had to refuse situations offered me. I appreciate all you say, and I have implicit faith in your goodness. If you will take my—my baby—you may have her."

The suggestion staggered him.

"Take Ethel!" he exclaimed. "Take the last child from you! Anna, you cannot mean it!"

"I—I know," she stammered, "that it will be hard. I have missed Alice so much, and Ethel is like half of my heart. But—I cannot take your money. I can let you spend it for her, without feeling the sense of shame that would come if it were for myself. You can place her with some kind lady who will be a mother to her, and I—I shall get along very well, I have no doubt."

A bright idea flashed into his mind.

"If you will let me select the lady who is to care for her—"

"With pleasure," she responded, "for I should have perfect confidence in your choice."

"And you seek a situation?" he added, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Consider yourself engaged."

She was not to be caught at once with this lure, attractive though it was, and she protested that he ought to take her proposition more seriously.

"You cannot understand," said she, "how degraded I should feel to accept your bounty after the talk of love that has passed between us. It will be hard for me to earn my living—I never dreamed how hard until I tried it—but it can be done. Mr. Darrell has Alice and he will not let her suffer. You may take Ethel, if you will be so kind, and when both hands are free I can battle with my fate alone."

Again there swept over him a wave of passionate longing. Whether she were another man's wife, whether she were ever to be his, what mattered it? He loved her! And, as before, at her cottage at Stillwell, he took her in his arms.

"*You* talk of hiding away from me—*you!*" he cried, his voice shaking. "Who is being punished the most? *I!*" Life to me without you is colorless. I want you, Anna. I want you to hold next to my heart while existence remains to me. We shall both have to overcome the foolish notions due to education. You gave a soul all goodness and purity to a man who has trodden upon it like the proverbial swine upon the pearls. He has forfeited every right to you. Even the law has stepped in and barred him out. You are mine now, and I shall never resign you—never, never!"

He had one arm around her shoulders, and held her head back so that he could look into her eyes. All the woman that was in her pleaded for him.

"You are too generous," she began. "I ought not to allow you to say these things."

His lips touched hers. It was a caress as gentle as that which a mother gives to her sleeping babe.

"I have done with listening to you," he said, gravely. "You are not a fit person to entrust with important decisions. To-morrow I shall engage a house for you and Ethel, and you must go there."

A blush suffused her features.

"Careless one," she replied, "have you no thought of appearances? I could no more go to a house that you had hired, than—" She paused for a sufficiently strong simile. "Why, what would it indicate in the eyes of the world!"

He saw it as she did, now that the matter was presented to him.

"I am afraid common sense is deserting both of us," he admitted. "You are right, of course. Although I should not come there, my paying the

rent might make talk. I will therefore send a package of money—not to you, don't flatter yourself—but to Ethel. You can use it as you please, in her interest. I will keep away—if I can—until September. Confound Mrs. Grundy, what an idiot she is !”

Anna disengaged herself gently from his clasp, and stood gazing at him with eyes of affection.

“No, Harry, Mrs. Grundy is a very useful personage. She has a mission to fulfill. You have over-persuaded me, and I will accept your last offer, for Ethel's sake. But,” she paused, and her voice grew husky, “I can promise nothing more. Sometimes it seems as if I could not live without you ; and again, the frightful thought of two living husbands paralyzes me. You are too noble and generous to make this money the basis of any claim. I am sure of that, or I would not touch it. And now, we must say good-night.”

If there are, as we are taught in infancy, angels whose mission it is to record the struggles of men toward what is highest in their natures, they must have filled a page for Harold Mordaunt, as he pressed the hand of Anna Darrell and went his way.

The next day Anna decided that it would be best to engage a small suite of furnished apartments for herself and Ethel, rather than either a whole house or a boarding-place. The sum which came directed to “Miss Ethel Darrell” was sufficient for their necessities for months in advance. Time passed by. She heard often from Mordaunt, but never saw him. She had become quite reconciled to her lot, when one day, to her infinite astonishment, her Aunt Mehitabel presented herself at her door.

Her first thought was to refuse her admittance,

but she feared a scene in the hall-way, and she silently escorted the grotesque figure into her sitting-room. When the door was closed, the two women stood regarding each other with anything but friendly looks.

"I am not going to ask you to sit down," said Anna, in a voice whose firmness surprised even herself. "If you have any business to transact with me you can attend to it standing."

Miss Burton's sinister eyes flashed, as she let her gaze wander about the room.

"When you were at Stillwell," she said, icily, "I wrote you that I should have nothing more to do with you. But I cannot let my brother's daughter sink so low as this without an effort to save her. I came to ask you to return to Massachusetts; not to Auburn, for there you would cause talk that would be unpleasant to both of us; but to some quiet town in the vicinity, where I can supply your needs, and prevent further disgrace to your blood."

Anna felt all the infamy that was meant by these words, but she made no reply. She was like one petrified.

"Ever since you first met the wretch whom you afterwards married," continued her aunt, "I have noticed a change in you. All the advice I have given has been wasted. I thought when I wrote that letter to Stillwell that it would bring you to your senses. I imagined that you had had enough of stubbornness. It seems that I was mistaken. There were other depths into which you could descend, and you a Burton! Goodness, girl, are you going to stare at me all day like that! Have you no reply to make?"

For answer, Anna stepped to the door of the room, flung it open, and pointed to the stairway.

"Oh, you turn me out, do you!" screamed the spinster. "But I tell you I will not endure it! I will inform the police and have you taken into court. You shall not go on in this way! You—"

The tension into which the woman's nerves had been wrought proved too much for her. She staggered to a chair, where her evident weakness began to alarm her niece.

"I am growing old," said Miss Burton, querulously, when she regained her voice. "Ephraim is growing old. We have saved our money all our lives for you. When you exhausted our patience, I had a new will made, giving the property to missionary societies. It was not what I wanted to do, but your conduct compelled it. But, bad as you are, you are of our family, and I would rather you had our money than any one else. Leave this place, Anna. Come with me and I will destroy the will that disinherits you. I think I have not long to live, and I want this matter settled before I die."

Anna could not trust herself to speak. Her only desire was to bring the interview to a close.

"What do you say?" repeated Miss Burton. "Will you not give me an answer?"

The extended arm, with the hand pointing to the street entrance, was the only reply she received.

"Then God forgive you!" moaned the aunt. "May He judge between us. I am too weak to walk back to the station. Will you be kind enough to let some one call a carriage?"

There is something in unmerited insult that freezes the natural compassion in the veins of women. Anna's heart would have melted with pity at the

sight before her, had its victim been a total stranger. As it was, she saw and heard only the hard woman who had trampled on her tenderest feelings, and crowned it all by an accusation that she could not overlook.

Leaving the room, she rang for the janitor of the building, and sent him for the carriage as requested. Luckily, Ethel was out walking with the maid, and the aunt and niece were the sole occupants of the apartment. When the janitor returned, Anna asked him to assist the lady in the next room to the street, and herself remained out of sight till she was gone. She knew that if she trusted herself to say a word, she should break into reproaches, and that the safest policy was silence. But when she heard the carriage roll away, she felt a little guilty, after all.

"It is very hard to do exactly right," she murmured to herself, "but there is a limit to what human nature can endure."

She heard from Edmund once—a brief note saying that he had arrived safely at Paris, and that Alice was well. He made no allusion to the past, and gave no definite address. It was clear that he had burned the bridges behind him, and left her to follow her own course.

When September came—that September that Mor-daunt had waited for—the cable flashed the news that Napoleon III. was a prisoner of the Germans, and that his empire lay a crushed and broken thing under the feet of Bismarck. The conquering army was advancing upon the capital of France. Its march would alter the destiny of a nation, but to

the mother it meant but one thing—danger to the child she had surrendered.

Mordaunt had spent the summer in a ceaseless round of the watering-places, vainly hoping to hasten the dull, dragging days. When September arrived, he felt that he must know his fate. He could wait no longer. He wrote to Anna that he was coming to visit her, and conjured her by all that she held sacred to let no foolish considerations stand in the way of their speedy union. When they met he saw in her eyes nothing that encouraged him.

"You have heard the news from France?" she said, anxiously. "I am very uneasy about Alice. If the Germans surround Paris she will be in great danger. Why did I let her go? I have regretted it every moment since."

"I do not think she is in especial peril," he replied, soberly. "But it will be easy for you to ascertain, if you desire. We will go there—on our wedding journey."

She paled at the suggestion.

"It is hardly fair," she said, "that you should use my mother-love to influence me. I wish I knew she was safe. I have telegraphed three times, and received no answer. As I did not know Edmund's address, I have tried to reach him through the American ministry or consulate. It does not seem wise for me to go, knowing nothing of the country or the language, but if I had some one—a—friend, who would—"

Their eyes met.

"I will go," he said quietly. "It matters little to me where I am, so long as you will not give me your love, your heart—"

"Oh, Harry," she cried, "my love and my heart were yours long ago!"

"If it must be," he continued, not noticing the interruption, "that you will not trust your life in my keeping, one part of the world is the same to me as another. I will go to Paris on the next steamer, and send you word what I learn. But I shall not return to America. I have borne as much as I can, and my native land has grown hateful to me."

She came close to him, and placed her hands on his shoulders.

"I do not deserve such devotion," she whispered. "I wish—oh, how I wish!—that I could requite it better!"

He put his arm about her, in the old, familiar fashion.

"I ought not to complain," he said. "With the love that you tell me is mine I ought to be supremely happy. Why am I not, I wonder? Why do I grow sick and pine for the substance as well as the spirit? But if I am to catch the next steamer I must be in New York to-night. Bring in Ethel for me to kiss, and I will go."

Miss Ethel was not troubled with scruples. Her delight at seeing Mordaunt was unrestrained. She sat on his knee till the clock warned him that he must depart, and relinquished her place very reluctantly at last.

Mordaunt stood for some minutes, with Anna's hand in his, reluctant to break the hold that seemed now so slight.

"The sea has its dangers," he said, in a low voice.

"I will pray for you."

"If I should perish, what should be my last thought?"

"That I have done what I believed right," she replied, weeping. "That I love you, and shall be true to that love as long as I have life."

He knew that if he gave way in the least his fortitude would be shaken, and with a gentle kiss upon her cheek he silently withdrew.

Before he slept that evening he read over his will, made the previous spring, devising the bulk of his property to Ethel Darrell and her mother. Should it ever be probated in those terms, it might excite comment from the people who are always ready to think evil. On the other hand, they were the ones he loved best on earth, and they would need his care even after his death. Yes, the testament should stand unaltered.

There was a bridal couple on board the steamer—a happy pair who billed and cooed all day long in their chairs upon the deck. Mordaunt heard accidentally that the bride had recently been divorced from an uncongenial first partner, with whom she had led a dreary life.

"What a difference there is in women," he muttered to himself.

But, the more he thought of it, he did not like Anna less for the contrast.

CHAPTER XXVII

SHUT UP IN PARIS.

Mordaunt was in time to get into Paris before the German army invaded it, but he was not in time to get out again as soon as he could have desired. He found Darrell with little trouble—not through the American officials, from whom the Communist purposely kept aloof, but by a quiet investigation made by a member of the detective force, whom he engaged for the purpose. Darrell was too much wrapped up in the main object of his life to devote a great deal of attention to his former friend. He received him in fact without exhibiting either pleasure or regret ; but in answer to questions he stated that Alice was quite well and that he had no intention of allowing her to return to her mother.

"It is only fair that I should keep one, Harry," he said, "when you are to have the other two."

Mordaunt bit his lips.

"I am to have neither of them," he replied. "I came here at Mrs. Darrell's request, to ask you to let me save Alice from the extreme dangers that surround Paris. That is my only errand. If you positively refuse, I have only to telegraph her mother to that effect, and pursue my journey toward the east."

Darrell took a newspaper from his pocket and held it up.

"Some kind friend has sent me this—the announcement the *nisi* divorce has been made absolute. I do not see why you and Anna should postpone

your happiness. Surely there is nothing in the way."

How could he have loved this man, almost like a brother, for so many years !

"Mrs. Darrell is perfectly free," he answered, frigidly, "and purposes remaining so."

Darrell looked surprised.

"I must inquire the reason," he said. "What stands between you now ?"

"*You* do," was the quick reply. "She has an old-fashioned notion that a woman should not have two living husbands."

Darrell pulled his moustache for some moments.

"That is nonsense," he said, at last, "if she applies it to this case. As far as she is concerned, I am as if I had never existed. The law joined us and the law has dissolved our union. She is a good girl and I seriously hoped you were united before this time. I tried to right myself last summer, but it was too late. She refused to live with me again, and there was nothing more to be said. I took Alice and came here, where there is likely to be enough soon to absorb all my attention. I have grown very fond of the child, and I could not think of parting with her. If you can secure a passport you had best go without delay. Paris is going to be an uncomfortable place for men with your views before the winter is over."

"With my views?" repeated Mordaunt. "Then I should think it a poor place for any American."

"If you refer to me, I am not an American," was the quick reply. "No, I am a Frenchman while this conflict lasts. Napoleon is dethroned, as I predicted to you that he would be, that day at the Arch of Triumph ; but there is still much to be done. Our

new rulers are almost as despotic as those we have overthrown."

"I fear the French have little chance of defeating the Germans," responded Mordaunt. "With no recognized leader whom all are bound to obey, they will be at the mercy of the invaders. The Teutons will enter these gates before Christmas unless aid comes from some unexpected source."

Darrell smiled.

"Let them enter. The Communists have no wish to keep them out. The French people must be humbled before it can hope to arise triumphant. Let the Germans batter in our walls and spread their armies over our streets. Eventually they will have to retire, and out of the chaos the People will come purified. To-day, we have only exchanged a Bonaparte for a Thiers. I welcome the Prussian as part of the discipline we need; but you, who love royalty for itself alone, can have no object in remaining. So I say to you again, procure your passport before it is too late."

Mordaunt sent a cablegram to Anna, saying briefly that Alice was well and that he could not induce her father to release her. But when he sought his passport, he found that there were innumerable difficulties in the way. After weeks of fruitless efforts, the shelling of the city began, and he found himself doomed to remain within the walls. A document with which Minister Washburn provided him made his passage safe about the city, but the dullness of his imprisonment became almost insupportable.

He varied the monotony of his life by calling frequently upon Alice, to whom her father gave him free access and who remembered him perfectly. The child wept when he spoke of her mother and sister,

whom she admitted she missed sadly, but she did not wish to leave her father.

The perfect devotion that she had for him was almost like worship. It could not be accounted for on any ordinary hypothesis. To her he represented all that was good, great and noble. The hour or two each day which she passed with him were her happiest moments. She was nominally under the charge of a Parisian governess, who assisted her in her simple lessons in English, and in acquiring the Gallic tongue, which she absorbed with astonishing readiness. Before Mordaunt's arrival she understood practically everything that was said in her presence by the Frenchmen who called upon her father, and she had no difficulty in making herself comprehended.

She was given a full part, so far as such a young mind could be, in the constant conspiracy that was going on around her. Her father desired that she should be present whenever he had Communistic visitors, for he thought no age too young to imbibe that hatred of oppression that was his own ruling passion. It delighted him to hear the earnestness with which she would utter such expressions as "*À bas les royalistes !*" and "*Vive la Commune !*" On such occasions he would pat her on the head and respond, "*Ma bonne fille !*" She knew that she had pleased him, and for Alice there was no higher standard than this.

Among the people who gathered at Darrell's apartments were many women. Some of the most pronounced revolutionists were of the so-called gentler sex. Mistaken they may have been in their over-zeal, but they made as unselfish and as earnest a band as were ever engaged in any cause. They easi-

ly distanced their masculine coadjutors in fearlessness, disdain for personal consequences and faith in the success of their principles. One evening Darrell was surprised by an unexpected addition to their ranks. A Mlle. Thierry brought with her an American lady, for whom she gave her fullest voucher. It was Laura Casson.

Darrell knew it was Laura Casson, but he had to admit that she was greatly changed. She had now abundant threads of white in her hair and many of those lines that tell of suffering about her mouth and eyes. He was not willing to follow the hint that her quick glance gave him and pretend that he did not know her. He preferred to say, coldly, "I think I have met Miss Casson in America," and then he went on with the business of the evening as if nothing had happened.

"The republican government is not likely to make additional trouble for itself by molesting any of us at present," he said. "It has quite enough to do to resist the siege. If, however, we should be placed under arrest, it would only hasten the revolt that is brewing in the breasts of our friends the National Guards, and lead all the quicker to the opening of the gates to the Prussians. For one, I hope the contest will be a prolonged one. I want it continued until the temporary masters of France become as obnoxious to the people as were their imperial predecessors. Our country is eighty years behind the true hour of her destiny. Except for the unhappy ascendancy of the first Bonaparte, she would have taken her rightful place before the end of the last century. We must see to it that she is not controlled by another Man on Horseback, when next we find her bleeding in the dust."

These sentiments were warmly endorsed by all present, and similar utterances were made in impassioned language, by many others, both men and women. Arrangements for carrying on the propaganda were made, reports were received from various committees, and new life was instilled into the movement. It was one of the peculiarities of the French Commune that most of the leaders were men of foreign birth, and none of them were more trusted than Edmund Darrell. His untiring labors, his marked devotion made him conspicuous even in ranks where such qualities were the common property of all.

When the meeting broke up Miss Casson told her friend, Mlle. Thierry, that she had a little business to transact with Mr. Darrell, and remained after the others had departed. But when she found that they were alone she could hardly trust herself to speak.

"The Cause promises well," she managed to articulate, after an embarrassing pause.

"I should answer 'yes' and 'no' to that," he replied. "The test will come when we have to rely on these mercurial French to fight the government forces. I will say, however, that I have high hopes."

"You were surprised to see me here."

"Yes. How did you manage to pass the barriers?"

"There is no guard so strong that it can keep a woman from the man she loves," she answered, with set lips.

The reply startled and did not please him.

"For God's sake, Laura," he said, "is this a time to talk of love—when we are all lying with our necks under the knife! I have but one sweetheart, one wife, one hope—*France!*"

A look of pain and sorrow shot across her face.

"You know that her absolute decree of divorce has been granted?" she said.

"Yes, and I am glad it is so."

"She will marry Mordaunt. Probably she has done so already." added the woman, craftily.

"It would be all the same to me," he responded, wearily, "but you are mistaken. He is here, in Paris."

"Here!" she cried, with a start.

"Here. He called at this house this morning. He has been in the city for some weeks."

Her look of incredulity faded slowly away.

"What is he doing here? He cannot be in sympathy with us."

"No. He is only waiting an opportunity to get away. He was caught unintentionally when the siege began."

She eyed him narrowly.

"And he calls on you. Are you friends with him?"

He took up a book on the table—a *Life of Voltaire*—and turned the leaves abstractedly.

"I am no longer the friend or the enemy of any man," he said. "I am only the friend or the enemy of principles. Harold Mordaunt's affairs are without interest to me. I care no longer for anything, but the Commune—and—Alice."

As she gazed at him with new inquiry he added—

"My little daughter, who is here with me."

She could not help a blind and unreasoning jealousy of his wife's child overcoming her at that moment.

"You took a child from her, then?"

"I left one and took one. She agreed that it was fair. But of what interest are these things to you? We can never again be more than the merest acquaint-

ances. The past, as far as you and I are concerned, 's buried."

She was a picture of audacity as she replied.

"Why?" she demanded, harshly.

"Because I wish it so," he answered, with abruptness. "All my time, all my energies, all my thoughts, are embarked in the cause of the freedom of France. My life has hitherto been full of errors. I will keep it as it should be henceforth."

There seemed little use in talking to him, but she did not know when she would have another opportunity.

"Do not forget one thing," she said. "Your first mistake was when you married. All the others grew out of that one."

"Perhaps so; I will not dispute you," he answered; "but what is the use of discussing it now?"

"There is this use," she said. "You have never heard my whole story and I have waited here to tell it to you. Will you listen?"

He took out his watch impatiently, and bade her proceed. If he must hear this, he thought it quite as well that it should be now.

"When you first knew me," she said, "I was engaged to be married to Professor Marlin. He had taken me when I was a homeless little orphan, adopted and educated me. When he asked for my hand I did not know how to refuse him, for there was no other way to discharge the heavy debt I had incurred. He was the kindest and the best of men. He admitted that he had been in love with me ever since I was fifteen years of age. He alluded to our inequality of years, and said he did not want me to marry him unless I could bring to him my whole heart. At that time the thought of love for another

had never entered my head, and I promised to be his wife on my nineteenth birthday. In the interim I met you, and before I was aware of it all the affection that had waited for a responsive touch was awakened."

Darrell moved uneasily in his chair, evidently much disturbed.

"Laura," he began, in a tone of protest.

"Hear me," she replied, "for my story is not a long one. I cared for you from the first day we met, but, even on that afternoon when you declared yourself, I did not realize the full extent of my feelings. I supposed my promise to the Professor almost as binding as a ceremony, and the thought of breaking it never entered my mind. When he entered the room and found me with my arms about your neck, you remember how kind he was. When you had gone, he took me on his knee and said there was yet time to annul our contract, and that if I would say the word he would consider our engagement ended. Then he left me, and for days we hardly saw each other.

"The more I tried to think I ought to marry him the more I could not. Your face always came before me. I wanted to see you again and test my heart in your visible presence, but you did not come, and I did not know where you had gone. The next thing was your letter informing me that you had taken a wife. The world receded from me. As I was reading it Professor Marlin entered the room. The suffering on his face taught me my duty. I thought of all his years of more than fatherly tenderness, and I told him I had made up my mind.

"But he was never deceived. My spirits could not rise again to their former level. I grew more

and more despondent as the wedding day approached, and though I did my best to conceal it, he knew how unhappy I was. You know how he went to the Parker House, and how, before the ceremony was performed, he was dead. After the funeral, his lawyer handed me an envelope directed to myself, and I found two documents within. One was his will, bequeathing me the whole of his estate. The other was a letter, dated three weeks before.

"In that letter he stated that he had a premonition that he should never live to marry me—that he was destined to a sudden death. In case his anticipations proved true, he begged me not to spend too long a period in mourning for him, but to give my hand to some good man, without needless delay. A fear came over me, as I read it, that all was not right with him. A physician, at my request, made an autopsy, and found that he had taken poison."

Darrell was interested at last.

"That is dreadful!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered, looking fixedly at him. "He killed himself that I might be happy. You know the Scripture says, 'Greater love hath no man than this.' No one has ever been told of it. You, I, and the doctor are the only persons who know. The Professor had no relations and ten years have passed. That is why I feel safe in confiding the fact to you."

There was a momentary silence, and then Darrell said:

"I must confess that I hardly see your object."

"Is it too much," she asked, "that such sacrifice should bear its legitimate fruit? Until a year ago you were all to me that you could be and still maintain fealty to your foolish marriage. Now you are

no longer bound. For nine years of my life—those years that ought to be worth most to a woman—I gave every thought to you. You have no right to cast me off.”

He looked sufficiently astounded.

“Well, Laura,” he said, “I never thought you would come to this!”

“Thought!” she exclaimed, scornfully. “What do men like you think! Did you imagine I was made of stone or iron? I was eighteen years of age when we wept in each others arms because of what stood in the way of our union. I was only nineteen when I found myself an unwedded widow, unable to shed tears over the grave of my benefactor, because his death left my path the more open to you. Then you returned to me—have you forgotten it—with protestations of an undiminished love, and I took you for what you were, or rather, for what you seemed. I have endured all the tortures that a sensitive mind can feel, knowing that you were hers by the law, and mine only by the light meaning of a word. You never realized what agonies I passed through in those years, for I have always tried to turn to you the face of a sphinx, resolved to perish rather than let you know the fire that was consuming me. I talked of Communism, social reforms—of everything but love! I sat with you day by day, listening to everything but that which I hoped and prayed for—a declaration that you, like me, had borne ail that you could bear. Sometimes it seemed to me that your calmness was, like mine, assumed. Sometimes it came upon me, as I know it now, that the affection you had felt for me in my girlhood had died and been buried. Month after month, year after year, I endured it, Edmund, for at least I had

your presence with me. But, when you came no more, my fortitude gave way."

He murmured something about the uselessness of such reminiscences, and the pain that would ensue from calling them up, but she would not cease.

"I was an attractive girl when you first knew me. I have portraits that tell me I was almost beautiful. I am an old woman now. See! I am growing gray. I am twenty-nine! The woman you married is about my age, but I might be her mother, if looks could count. I have seen her, tall and fresh and ruddy. She came to my house to show me how much she ought to be preferred. I wonder that I let her depart alive. She had borne two children to you. Two! I did not know till Harold Mordaunt came from Europe and unwittingly exposed the secret. But she is gone; she is no longer your wife, and it is time you did me justice."

With these words Laura Casson arose with dignity and took her departure. And Darrell sat there dumb-founded for a long time, till it dawned upon him that her mind had probably become affected by the strain upon it; and that she was in a measure irresponsible for what she said.

In a few days the German cannon began to throw shot into the city and little Alice found herself confined to the limits of the house and garden in the Rue Vaugiraud. Her father was now very busy, and only saw her for a few moments each night and morning, except when a meeting was held at her rooms, when as before she was always allowed to be present. The provisions grew short, and the horrors of famine began to prevail around them, but Darrell, with commendable foresight, had filled his cellar with an abundance that enabled him, not only

to supply his own table, but to assist many of his friends who would otherwise have suffered much.

Mordaunt, weary of idleness, offered his services to the government, and his medical knowledge found him plenty to do in the hospitals.

So the terrible winter passed away, till one day in March the hated Prussians walked into the city. And soon after, William the Kaiser was crowned German Emperor in the palace of Louis the Great at Versailles.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIDE BY SIDE.

This is not a history of the French Commune. The terrible events of that spring of 1871 in Paris have been told and re-told until the world is familiar with them.

Edmund Darrell threw himself into the popular cause with all the fervor that was in him. He was a member of the committees of supply and defence, was called Citizen Darrell by his associates, and entrusted with important affairs.

Slowly the Communistic forces were overcome by the better fed and better drilled soldiers of the Versaillese government. Everybody conversant with the conditions knew that it was only a question of days when order would prevail, but the Parisians held out with unexampled desperation.

On the 15th of May, Darrell assisted at the demolition of the Colonne Vendôme, with feelings

of genuine satisfaction. As the great bronze structure fell, he imagined he could see falling with it the tyranny that had enslaved man for centuries. He remarked with pleasure that the statue of the first Napoleon, which had surmounted it, was broken in pieces, and that its head was severed from its body.

But the joy of the Commune was of brief duration. Within a week the actual taking of the city had begun, and in a few days more only the most foolhardy of the defenders had any doubt that the end was near. Government troops penetrated to the Place de la Concorde and the Place de l'Opera. Others took possession of the Parc Monceau and still others occupied the Champs de Mars, the Ecole Militaire and the Invalides.

Those in charge of the municipal defence, from their quarters in the Hotel de Ville, issued orders to resort to the ancient system of barricades, and these were erected in all directions. Passers-by were arrested and pressed into the service under threats of assassination. Mordaunt was stopped one morning on his way to a hospital, and ordered to assist the diggers who were throwing up earthworks. Upon his refusal, in terms more energetic than polite, he was about to be executed without further parley, when George Clarkson appeared upon the scene. He, like Darrell, was a member of committees, and his authority sufficed to save the American. He was a mere wreck, physically, but the excitement of the contest kept him on his feet. The members of the National Guard always spoke of him as "the Ghost."

"What can you gain by holding out any longer?" said Mordaunt to him, when they were a little removed from the scene of his late imminent danger. "It must be evident to you that your cause is utterly

hopeless. The Versaillaise will shoot you all down like dogs in a few days more."

"That is true," was the response. "Most of us will die here, but what of that? As the blood of the martyrs has proved the seed of the Church, so our deaths will do more than our lives could accomplish for France and humanity. Posterity will be compelled at least to own our valor. Have you heard of the women who went yesterday with a demand for a mitrailleuse for the barricade in the Place du Palais Royal? Each one wore crape for a lover or brother, whom they had sworn to avenge. There were no horses to be had, and they dragged the machines by hand, first fastening their skirts about their waists to prevent them impeding their march. A people like this can never be wholly crushed. Our cause is just, and as for our lives—what are they? It is but a few years at most that any of us would live. If we sacrifice ourselves for Liberty, do we not die well?"

The last struggle took place on Saturday, May 27th. Three-quarters of the attacking army were massed in a semi-circle, the two extremes of which rested on the ramparts, the intermediate portion following the boulevards to the Chateau d'Eau. General Douay advanced by the Faubourg du Temple. General Clinchart attacked by the Boulevard Prince-Eugene. Everywhere the resistance was furious. At the intersection of the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir and the Boulevard Prince-Eugene, stood a barricade sixty yards in length. As the obstacle was unapproachable in front, the troops advanced by the Bastille, and succeeded in placing the fortification between two galling fires. The slaughter that

ensued was terrible. The ground was clotted with blood, and corpses lay in heaps.

Here Darrell fought, counselling his associates not to yield an inch of territory until the latest moment. At last the remnant of the survivors fell back. That evening the Buttes Chaumont were taken, with about eight thousand prisoners. The Cemetery of Père-Lachaise also fell into the hands of the troops, and General Ladmirault took the Abattoir and Cattle Market of La Villette. Such fury of attack and such desperation of resistance can hardly find a parallel in modern warfare.

The National Guards who were left from the general destruction plunged into excesses when night compelled a cessation of the more active hostilities. Many of them got drunk on wine and stronger liquors, and terrorized whole districts. Women and children were assaulted, not only in the street, but even in their own residences. No accurate report of the outrages committed can ever be made, but in their recklessness the Guards spared neither friend nor foe. They seemed to realize that order would soon be restored, and that they must make immediate use of their freedom.

Tired out with the work of the day, Citizen Darrell ate his loaf of bread at Belleville, and issued his orders for the morrow. Though he must have realized how hopeless was the contest of his broken ranks against the disciplined and victorious legions of the enemy, he gave no sign of discouragement. He had taken his life in his hand and well knew his probable fate. If he did not fall in battle, a speedy execution was almost certain to be his doom. The Federals already taken had been mowed down in crowds by the government rifles. He was quite

ready to follow them. Had he been offered a guard to escort him safely beyond the lines, he would not have accepted it. Such is the sublimity to which man can rise, either in a good cause or a bad one.

Citizen Darrell had lain down on a mattress in one of the buildings, in hopes to get a few hours of sorely-needed sleep, when the sentinel at his door came to say that some one wished to see him immediately. When the visitor was admitted, Darrell's face, covered as it was with traces of smoke and powder, darkened still more ; for he recognized at once the features of George Clarkson.

"Do you come on business of the State?" he demanded, sharply.

"No," replied Clarkson, not raising his eyes, "but it is a personal matter of the greatest importance."

Darrell's voice was as hard as steel when he replied.

"There can be no personal matter between me and you. I forbade you ever to speak to me, and I now repeat the prohibition."

He looked at Clarkson's face as he finished, and something in it alarmed him.

"It is not about—about—Alice?"

Clarkson's head hung yet lower.

"Speak, man!" cried Darrell. "I can bear it. Is she dead?"

The drooping eyes were lifted to the father's face.

"Worse," he answered.

For a minute Darrell's heart, so strong in all the carnage of the day, grew sick and faint.

"Tell me all," he said. "But, remember, I do not want your sympathy. I ask nothing but the fact."

"A little while ago," said Clarkson, slowly, "I

met a number of National Guards, all intoxicated. They were carrying away your child and several women by force. I followed them for some distance, hoping to get help to effect a rescue, but all the other Guards that they met laughed at the tears of the captives and greeted their comrades with jocular remarks. Finally I spoke to the men who carried Alice, offering them all the money I had with me for her. They refused with oaths, and continued on their way. In desperation I fired into the party, killing several of them, and received this wound in return."

Darrell now noticed for the first time that one sleeve of Clarkson's coat hung limp at his side. A bullet had shivered the bone of his left arm. The father broke into apologies, but the man stayed him.

"We may be able to overtake them if you can find any of the Guards who are sober," he said.

"I will not wait for that," cried Darrell, throwing on his coat, and taking up a musket. "Show me where they are. I am a match for twenty of them alone."

But before they had gone a hundred paces, a Guard stopped him with a letter.

"It is about your child, Citizen," he said

This was the contents of the note :

AT THE RAMPARTS, MIDNIGHT.

DEAR EDMUND: Some of our men captured a party of Federals a few moments ago, and I found Alice with them. The Guards who had her were too drunk to resist, and, being taken with arms in their hands, were promptly shot. I shall take the best of care of your child till I see you again. But will you **not** take this opportunity to save your life? I am

promised by the commandant that if you will surrender at once you shall be allowed to depart freely.

HARRY.

Leaving Clarkson in the street, Darrell returned to his post with the feeling of one who is partially paralyzed. The next day he fought like a demon. Before night he was surrounded and taken prisoner, after a desperate resistance. Having secured the deep attachment of the general in charge, Mordaunt was enabled, in spite of all, to save him, and to Darrell's surprise he was marched off to a prison instead of joining the others, who were destined to immediate death.

The bravery of the American surgeon, and the value of his services, also secured to him a document ordering the same disposition for two other Americans supposed to be among the captured, but he could not find them in time. One was a defiant woman in the prime of life, the other an emaciated man with a broken arm. Both were taken with arms in their hands, and after suffering various indignities, were placed against a blank wall to be shot. The man pleaded earnestly with his captors, not for his own life, but for hers. He urged her sex, her nationality, even the doubtful condition of her mind, and offered to give an order for a large sum of money, but in vain. He soon saw that nothing could move the heart of the lieutenant, who had had two brothers murdered by the Communists. Time was pressing. The lives of the prisoners were limited to seconds. They granted him leave at last to go to the woman's side and speak to her.

"Laura," he said, "we are to die."

"Yes," she replied, with a proud smile, "for France and humanity!"

"You—you are not afraid?"

"No."

The tears came into his eyes.

"I have long had but one wish," he said. "Will you not let it be gratified? A priest is just below us. Let him say the words."

As she comprehended his meaning, she shook her head.

"Priests have had their day," she replied. "It is not for them to unite souls. Only great love or a great purpose can do that."

He took one of her hands in his.

"A great love is more than I can ask of you," he said, speaking rapidly, "but a great purpose we surely have in common. See! The soldiers are raising their rifles. They only wait the word of command. Let us go out of the world husband and wife!"

She had a momentary struggle, and then she said, "*We will.*" And as his lips touched her forehead, the spectators, who numbered thousands, heard the frightful crash of three hundred guns fired simultaneously.

The squad who buried the victims, found these two with their hands still clasped together; and they laid them side by side.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PEACE AT LAST

Through those long weeks when she could hear nothing from her friends shut up in Paris, Anna Darrell suffered all the tortures of suspense and fear. Her dearly beloved daughter was there, her lover, whom she had come to regard with the tenderest feelings, and her late husband, toward whom she could not bring herself to feel anything like animosity, now that he was in danger. Each day she scanned the newspapers for accounts of the situation, but found little to comfort her. The funds which Mordaunt had left "for Ethel" grew low, and another experience with want seemed about to stare her in the face. Even Laura Casson might have relented in her hatred had she seen her rival in those unhappy days.

When her affairs were at the lowest ebb, a letter came, bearing the post-mark of Auburn. She was not familiar with the writing, and she sat for a long time holding it in her hand, hardly daring to break the seal. Auburn! What a flood of memories the word brought! The scenes of her childhood, her youth, her marriage, all came back to her. In Auburn her children were born. In Auburn she first saw Harry Mordaunt. Across the hedge of her homestead she had heard her husband express doubt that she had been true to him, and there the love that had survived all his neglect died out of her breast forever. Who in Auburn could write to her?

The missive was a brief one, but its contents were momentous. The signature was that of Lawyer Jacobs. He wrote to say that her aunt was dead, and that her Uncle Ephraim wanted her to come and live with him. Miss Burton had been in feeble health, said the lawyer, for some time, and her decease was not unanticipated by the neighbors. He advised Anna to accept her uncle's invitation, and hoped she would come with the least possible delay.

Her first impression was that she had best not comply with the suggestion, but on reflection she decided to go. It would be hard to face the people of Auburn, who had always thought so highly of her, and who were now, without doubt, prejudiced by the slanderous tongue of rumor. They had known her when she was a happy wife and mother. They knew her now as a divorced woman, and whosever is the fault, a taint hangs to the divorced person in the minds of the good back-country folk of New England. Probably they had also talked over her relations with Mordaunt, and drawn their own none too lenient conclusions. But her uncle was alone and wanted her, and it was her duty to go.

Ephraim Burton met her at the depot, a little more bent, a little more dried up than of yore, and escorted her to his lonely home. She thought she would have known, even if nobody had told her, that her aunt had died, for there was an atmosphere in the deserted rooms that only death can bring. Ephraim had a woman to do the housework—one of those noiseless-footed women that add to the stillness of the places where they walk. Little Ethel was unfavorably impressed by everything that she saw,

and did not at all like the idea of taking off her things and considering herself at home. Neither she nor her mother ate much of the supper that was prepared for them, and both retired early.

The next morning Ephraim told in slow language the story of his sister's death.

"After she come back from Philadelphia," he said, "she didn't seem to care any more for anything. She used to sit all day in the winder there with hardly a word, and her appetite fell away astonishing. I wanted to call the doctor, but she wouldn't hear to it. Some of the neighbors come in and offered to do anything they could for her, but she said there wasn't nothing to be done, and that she would be out in a few days. You know, Anna, that your aunt always had her own way, and I couldn't do anything right against her will. The morning she died—and I hadn't the least idea she was so near the end—she talked to me about you. At first she scolded, and said you ought to have known better than to have acted so cross when she went to see you. And then she grew very tender like, and asked me to bring her that last will that Jacobs made, leaving the property to the missionaries. I didn't know what to do, then, for I had burned it up as soon as it came home, for fear anything should happen to me suddenly, and I didn't mean that you should lose what belonged to you by right. But I pertended to hunt for it, and at last I come back, as she was getting uneasy, and said I couldn't find it. She was very low, then, and I got scared, and asked her to let me go for help, but she wouldn't. 'I want you to promise me, Ephraim,' said she, 'that you will destroy that will. I want Anna to have the property when you are through

with it, and I want her to come here and live with you after I am gone.' I saw then for certain that she was really dying, and I called out of the window to one of the neighbors who was passing, to send the nearest doctor as soon as he could. When I got back to her she asked me again to promise, and I told her what I had done when the new will come home. You ought to have seen her smile. She caught my hand and held it tight, and when the doctor got there she was dead."

Anna wept at the recital. She had the satisfaction of knowing that the good will of her only relations was restored to her, though one of them had left earth too soon to feel her gratitude. The darling that her uncle had shown was a genuine surprise, and it revealed a new side of his nature. Crushed as he had been by the superior strength of mind of his strong-willed sister, he had yet dared to prevent the injustice which she contemplated toward their brother's child. Anna saw more than the assurance of a temporal comfort in the story of the old man. She learned that he had a warmer place in his heart for her than she had ever dreamed of, and that her aunt must have suffered something of the pangs that rent her own breast at the unfortunate circumstances which sundered them.

Ephraim Burton heard his niece's story of her fears in regard to her dear ones across the seas, and promptly advised her to take an early steamer for England, where she would be in a position to get the first news of them when the siege of Paris was raised. He provided her with funds for this purpose, and did everything that he could to facilitate her departure. She took Ethel with her, hating to leave the only child she could now claim, even

though there were great dangers in the journey she was about to undertake. Arriving at London she engaged a courier, and several days after the end of the Commune's struggle, she found herself in Paris.

Harold Mordaunt was easily found by the courier. The fame of the young surgeon had spread over the city, and he was as easy to locate as one of the successful generals. In two hours after he learned that Anna was in Paris he was by her side. And, more than that—much more, to her—he had Alice with him.

Sitting in her little parlor at a hotel, he told his story, and Alice told hers. He had recently proved beyond doubt that Clarkson and Miss Casson had perished in the manner related in the preceding chapter. One of the soldiers who participated in the execution had recognized Clarkson as a man whom he had seen talking once with Mordaunt, and had taken pains to bring him the sad news. Alice told how Clarkson had tried in every way to save her from the Guards who abducted her, and her mother's heart was touched. She freely forgave them both for the injury they had done to her, and uttered a prayer that Heaven would be merciful to their souls.

"As for your husband—I mean Mr. Darrell," said Mordaunt, in some confusion, "he is still in confinement. His life was promised me by one of my friends among the officers, who ordered him to be exempted from the general fate of those taken with him, but unfortunately the officer was killed the same day by the accidental explosion of a shell, and was consequently unable to carry out his agreement. The general-in-chief has strong evidence against Edmund, and so far my pleadings have been in vain.

I shall use every effort to have him released, but I must tell you that a feeling of bitterness to all of the prisoners who held out the longest prevails in official circles. If you would like to see him, I will obtain a permit."

Anna said immediately that she would go as soon as the document could be obtained, and Mordaunt went to get it.

"Citizen Darrell," as he called himself, said the governor of the prison, "is a very sick man. He had three wounds of which he never spoke when he came here, and the surgeons say he can live but a few days at the longest. There will probably be no more executions for a week, and by that time, if I do not mistake, he will have passed where another tribunal will judge his cause. His wife wishes to see him, you say? Certainly she shall have the privilege. This paper will admit her as often as she desires."

When Mordaunt and Mrs. Darrell were shown into the cell occupied by the invalid they found him in a high fever. The doctor who attended him told them that he was a little "flighty"—in that state where reason and unreason struggle for the mastery. Anna threw herself upon his breast, and kissed his pale lips with all the ardor of wifeness. According to the decision of a judge he was no longer her husband, but the near presence of the Great Destroyer brought back all her old affection.

"Do you know me?" she asked him, gazing longingly into his sunken eyes.

"Yes," he responded, with an attempt to smile. "And I know *him*, also. My wife and my old friend!"

"I have come across the seas to see you," she went on. "I hoped that I could do something for

you. I wanted to take you back to America, where we could be happy again."

"No," he said. "I have never made you happy, and I never could. He,"—he pointed to Mordaunt, who had retired to the farther corner of the room, "he is the one who can do that. I want you to love her, Harry, as I ought to have done. Promise me."

Then his mind wandered for a few moments.

"If he will not fight for the Commune, let him die!" he exclaimed. "What does he say—that he cannot disgrace his uniform? How could one disgrace the uniform that proclaims him a lackey of Bonaparte?—I love France! I love her as a bishop loves blood, as a Christian loves gold!—Never trust one who makes a parade of her virtue.—To-day unchastity is the crowning sin of woman, to-morrow it will be something else!—They say it is drink that keeps down the laboring classes. If I were one of them I would drink myself drunk and never live to see a sober hour. What have they to gain by consciousness?—I cannot kiss you. No one can give a true love-kiss unless his soul is on its bended knee!—If a city like this can supply the people with music, why not with bread? If it can give free water in the public fountains, why not in the dwellings of the poor? If the authorities can pay priests, why not doctors?—Every man believes in a God; otherwise he thinks a Shakespeare or a Newton the greatest mind that ever existed.—Why have they brought me here? I demand my privilege to die with the rest!"

Then he roused himself, and said, feebly—

"Where is Alice? They told me she was safe. Can you not bring her to me?"

Anna held his hot hands.

"Can you understand me perfectly?" she asked.

He nodded.

"She is such a child, Edmund. I fear it would give her too great a shock. But if you wish it—"

He shook his head.

"No. I was very thoughtless. She ought not to come. But she loves me very much, and her heart was in the Cause. Did you know that Clarkson had an arm broken when he tried to save her? I thought I would never speak to him again, but I thanked him for that. Have you seen Alice? Mordaunt has her. He will take good care of her and of you. Is the other one well—Ethel? They are good children. I have been a bad father. Teach them to forgive me, if you can."

She told him that they both loved him very much, and that they had nothing to forgive. And her tears fell fast.

"I am sorry—very sorry," he went on, "for the way I used you. I thought my happiness bound up in another; but I was true to you, Anna, through it all. I neglected you, but I was not as bad as you might have thought. It was all a terrible mistake. Then you remember how I blamed Harry. I saw afterward how wrong that was. Where is he? I want to see him."

Mordaunt came forward, and the dying man put their hands in those of each other.

* * * * *

"I am only sorry for one thing," said Mrs. Mordaunt, on the day that she found herself entitled to bear that name, "and that is that I let you kiss me and take me in your arms so long ago. I cannot

excuse myself, for by the ties of law I was then the wife of another."

"But I was your husband's friend," he answered. "It cannot be that you intend to let that little slip distress you."

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"A *little slip*!" she echoed. "You would not call it a *little slip* if I should do the same thing now with some one else!"

"Ah!" he cried with a start. "That would be a very different thing!"

She laughed softly at his earnestness, and as they were talking the children came to join them.

"And how do you like your new papa?" she asked.

Ethel came and nestled to Mordaunt's side, lifting her rosy mouth for him to kiss, but Alice burst into sobbing.

"I am glad mamma is to be happy," she said, when she could speak, "and I am sure I like you, and I hope you won't think me naughty. But, oh, I did love my father so much!"

And Mordaunt took her in his lap, and his own eyes filled as he soothed her against his breast.

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